1884

THE COURAGE OF Nikolai

Mary E. Rupp

A Story of Russia

LAMPLIGHTER RARE COLLECTOR SERIES

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PREFACE.

Who would have guessed that this stranger, left for dead in the middle of a snow-covered road, should turn out to be a ____? Life in Russia is tense—and dangerous—during the years before the Revolution. It is a rare thing indeed to find someone as trustworthy and courageous as young Collia in this world of undercover societies and secret police.

Bravely and persistently, Collia wrestles with the ghastly fear that chills his heart; and at last there comes to him—in answer to his prayer for courage and help—a growing, deepening calm, as he gives himself up into wiser hands than those of any human protector.

Believe it or not, the sensational events that surround Collia's life are, in fact, based on truth. Enjoy this exciting glimpse of life in pre-Revolutionary Russia.

Mark Hamby
Joshua 1:9

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The contents of this book may contain some stereotypical phraseology that is not the viewpoint held by Lamplighter. However, in order to help our readers to understand the thinking of the day and to accurately depict that period in history, we have chosen to leave these portions of the text as they were written. In addition, the rules of punctuation, spelling, and even sentence structure in the 1800s were different than our present-day standards. We have chosen to keep the original format as much as possible, editing only when deemed necessary.

THE COURAGE OF NIKOLAI:
A STORY OF RUSSIA

CHAPTER I.

AN ARRIVAL.

GOOD morning, Ivan Philipitch! Our Barrin[1] sends me to say that we are to go out into the wood this evening to choose two firs for the Christmas trees; one for the drawing-room and one for the servants. As usual, the master will give us the lights, and the fruit, and the bonbons, and a present each; and we can hang upon the tree anything else we like. Only he particularly wishes you to be of the party who cut down the trees, because you have done this for forty years, and some trouble might befall us during

[1] [**Bar**-yn'] A gentleman; normally a landowner with substantial property; comparable to the English lord of the manor.

the winter if you failed this Christmas to choose the Yolki."[2]

Old Ivan, the steward of the Vallikin estate, and a valued and trusted servant of Dimitri Romanovitch Roukassoff, smiled, and stroked his long white beard as he replied, "Agreed, Yakof; of course I will go: I am not so old yet that Father Frost[3] will nip me with his breath. The Barrin is right; it would hardly be a proper Yollki unless old Ivan chose it, and trimmed it, and arranged it for the great holiday."

"We are to have a supper in the big hall," continued Yakof, with a grin of satisfaction. "The Barynia[4] has bought five frozen geese, and a frozen ox for soup, meat, and roast, and we are to have pies of cranberry and apples, and—"

"There, there—that will do! I am not a boy that I should care for all the eating and drinking that come with the Prazdnik,"[5] cried old Ivan. "When thou art an old man, Yakof, it will be enough for thee if thou hast thy plate of cabbage

[2] [**Yol**-ki] Pine trees, specifically Christmas trees.

[3] In Eastern Slavic culture, Father Frost, or Grandfather Frost, brings presents to children at New Year celebrations.

[4] [**Bar**-y-nia] A Barrin's wife.

[5] [**Prahz**-nik] Holiday.

soup and thy bread and salt. Other things will make thy pleasure, and if trouble come to thee, it will not be mended by roast goose or cranberry pie."

"Enough, Batushka,"[6] said Nadeshda, the steward's wife, who was peeling potatoes into a wooden bowl on the table. "Enough, enough, Vania; thou wast young once—as was I too; and I have not forgotten the time when the Christmas dinner or supper was a great joy to me. As for thee, the first Christmas after thou and I were betrothed, I recollect that I felt quite jealous of the grand roast we had for dinner, because I fancied it claimed more attention from thee than did thy bride."

Old Ivan shook his head, but he smiled nevertheless, and nodded pleasantly enough to Yakof as he took his leave.

◊ ◊ ◊ ◊ ◊

The elderly couple had just finished their frugal repast of raw salt herring and boiled potatoes, washed down by kvass,[7] and Ivan was settling himself down for

[6] [bah-**tiush**-k*uh*] An endearing name to call one's father or husband.

[7] [kvahs] A fermented, mildly alcoholic beverage made from black or rye bread; a common drink in Eastern Europe since ancient times.

a nap, when there came an interruption in the shape of a youth wrapt in a black sheepskin, and wearing a rough fur cap. Rushing in somewhat unceremoniously, he shouted, "Ivan Philipitch, she's come! she's come!"

"What does the boy mean? Who is come?" exclaimed the old man, shivering a little as the keen frosty wind swept through the open door into the dim, hot little room.

"Why, the Anglichánka,[8] the new English governess,[9] of course. And they say she is from the great London, where the sun never shines, and the people breathe air thick like the steam of a kettle mixed with coffee grounds. Where they've no snow for sledge-roads,[10] and no black bread, no sour cabbage or frozen provisions. Bah! What a place! They must be savages who live there!" and the boy's bright face wore quite a pitying expression as he thought of poor London, wanting in what he considered the very necessaries of life.

"Well, Collia,[11] tell me, have you seen this lady?"

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[8] [angli-**chan**-ka] Englishwoman.

[9] A woman employed to educate and train the children of a private household.

[10] Sleigh-roads.

[11] Nickname for Nikolai.

"Yes, indeed," replied the lad. "I hear she travelled by post sledge as far as the town of S——, and there my father met her with the Barrin's spare troika.[12] A gentleman from St. Petersburg, an Englishman, was coming as far as S——, and he took care of her, for she knows nothing of our country, and cannot speak a word of our language. But at least she can smile, if she cannot speak, Ivan Philipitch; though—now I think of it—it is a wonder that anyone learns to smile in a country where the sun never shines. But she gave the sweetest smile as my father drove her up to the door, and I rushed up to help her out of the troika. She looked as kind and pretty as an angel, and she said something that sounded like *'Tankne,'* though what that may mean I know not."

"No, thou canst not know everything, my boy," remarked Ivan sententiously.[13] "Knowledge comes with time and grey hairs."

"Not always," laughed Collia, mischievously; "for there is old Matvey, whose beard is whiter than yours, and yet he

[12] [**troi**-k*uh*] A Russian carriage, wagon, or sleigh drawn by a team of three horses abreast.

[13] Self-righteously; briefly or concisely, and full of meaning; expressively.

has even less sense than me."

"That is not to laugh at," said the old man seriously. "His head received a blow when he was quite a child, and from that time the man himself grew, but the brain never grew any more, and he will ever—with his many years—have the thoughts and the ignorance of a child. But that was God's doing, and at God's doings thou must not laugh."

Collia's face sobered immediately, and for a moment there was silence; then Ivan said in a different tone, "Well, Collia, we go to-night to choose the Yollki. Wilt thou be of the party?"

"Yes, surely. And am I to come to supper afterwards?"

"Of course; and bring thy garmonia,[14] and give us a good tune. Ah, there is nothing like our Russian garmonia. I do not suppose that all London has an instrument like that."

◊ ◊ ◊ ◊ ◊

About seven o'clock that evening, while the young English governess, for the first time in a strange land, was standing at

[14] [gar-**mo**-ni-ya] Literally *harmony*; a musical instrument similar to the accordion, but with buttons rather than piano-like keys.

her window, she saw a number of dark figures emerge from the shadow of the house, and glide away over the snow towards the fir plantation, with lanterns in their hands, and a few pine-torches, which lent a weird picturesqueness to the scene.

It was not a very silent or ghostly party, however, for even through the well-stopped double windows of her warm and comfortable room, Mary Cornwall could hear the merry voices and ringing laughter of the men, as they tramped along through the snow in search of the trees which were so important a part of the Christmas festivities.

The contrast between their happiness and her own desolate, lonely feeling was too much for the young girl's self-control. With a sob she sank on her knees at the window-sill, and for a few moments gave herself up to the not unnatural thoughts which crowded upon her.

Fresh from a home which a father's recent death had rendered poverty-stricken and desolate, Mary Cornwall, through an acquaintance living in a Russian family in St. Petersburg, had obtained a situation as governess to the two little daughters of Dimitri Romanovitch Roukassoff,

a rich landed proprietor, who lived upon his own estate full thirty versts[15] from the nearest town, and surrounded by miles of forest and long stretches of barren waste.

And now, after a weary journey across the snow of this northern land, where all looked so new and strange, she was set down here without a familiar face near her, with everything about her still to learn. She had awakened, as it were, in an untried world, and she felt bewildered and strange, as though hardly sure that these unfamiliar surroundings were not the closing moments of some dream, the impression of which she would shake off presently.

But Mary Cornwall was not one to yield long to desponding[16] thoughts. She was a brave Christian girl, who knew, in her heart of hearts, and had proved in her past experience, that no soul is really alone that trusts in God. And presently the words that had half trembled upon her lips became a prayer, not only for herself, that God would give her grace to live this new life according to His will,

[15] [vurst, verst / vûrst] A Russian measure of linear distance equal to 3,500 ft., 0.6629 mi., or 1.067 km.
[16] Discouraging.

but that He would work by her, and give her the privilege of usefulness even in this strange and untried sphere.

Fainter and fainter the sounds died away in the distance; more and more indistinct grew the dark figures, till they melted into the night shadows, or mingled with the sombre blackness of the fir-wood.

And then came a timid knock at her door, and a fair little face peeped in, saying in French, which Mary understood, "Mademoiselle; mamma has sent me to ask you to come to dinner. She thought you would not understand what the servant said if she sent him, so I came instead."

Mary put her arm round the child, and together they went through a number of rooms on the same floor, till they reached the dining-saloon,[17] a long, low chamber, furnished rather stiffly with just a table and a number of leather-covered chairs, with the addition of the customary buffet cupboard in one corner, and a small table for *zakuska*[18] in the other. Round this were standing Dimitri Romanovitch

[17] A public room for a specific purpose, such as eating.

[18] [za-**koos**-ka] The first course of a meal, cf. antipasta, made up of a variety of seasonal cold dishes.

Roukassoff, his wife, Anna Petrovna, two gentlemen visitors, and the eldest daughter of the house, whom the others addressed as Olga.

As the governess and little Vera entered, room was made for them in the circle round the small table, and Madame Roukassoff said kindly:

"Mary we offer you *sacousca*, mademoiselle, or is this unknown in England? We Russians almost always take a little caviare,[19] or a bit of raw salt herring or ham, and a glass of vodki,[20] to give us an appetite for our dinner; but every nation has its customs, and this may seem strange to you."

Mary smilingly declined the *sacousca*, and the family sat down to dinner. It was the time of the winter fast,[21] which continues for several weeks up to Christmas; and poor Mary found it rather a difficult task to keep from looking with disgust at some of the dishes handed. The soup was made of dried mushrooms, and was

[19] [**kav**-ee-ahr / kav-ee-ahr] Caviar; the salted roe of sturgeon, usually served as an appetizer.

[20] [**vod**-kee] The plural of vodka; a clear distilled spirit.

[21] The Eastern Orthodox Church holds the winter fast beginning 40 days prior to Christmas. During this time, meat and dairy products are not eaten.

savoury even to an English taste; but then came fresh fish fried in oil, and garnished with raw chopped onions, beetroot, and salt cucumbers. Various preparations of fish and vegetables, salads and sweets followed, making a somewhat lengthy but not very palatable repast[22] to an Englishwoman accustomed to the plain, wholesome fare and simple cookery of the old country.

Mary's appetite, however, was not large, and she did not find it necessary to eat much besides the delicious bread which nestled within the intricately folded recesses of her dinner napkin; but the cup of strong, aromatic black coffee, handed round at the close of the meal, seemed to put new life and warmth into her.

She had just set her empty cup down upon the table before her, when there was a sound of voices in the ante-room,[23] and in a moment the butler—a grey-headed man who had been in the family for thirty years or more—came in, and said hurriedly to his master:

"Excuse me for disturbing you, sir, but an accident has happened. The men were

[22] A meal acceptable to the taste.

[23] Waiting room; entrance; reception area.

choosing the firs for the Christmas trees, and Collia, the coachman's son, somehow put his arm in the way of the axe, and old Ivan Philipitch did not see it, and aimed a blow at the tree, and poor Collia's arm is terribly wounded. The men carried him home bleeding terribly. He is insensible, and I fear he will die."

M. Roukassoff started[24] up. He had a kind heart, and almost a fatherly interest in his servants, some of whom had been serfs in his father's time, and were bound to his family by many a tie.

"It is a misfortune indeed!" he exclaimed. "And there is no doctor within thirty versts; what shall we do? Poor Collia!"

"May I ask what is the matter, madame?" asked Mary, in French. She saw that something was said.

"One of our young servants has been badly cut with an axe," replied Madame Roukassoff, and none of us know anything of surgery, and while we send for a doctor the boy may bleed to death."

Mary rose from her seat. "Will you allow me to see if I can do something for him?" she inquired eagerly. "My father was a surgeon, and I have often helped

[24] Moved suddenly, involuntarily, or in alarm.

him with his poorer patients. I may not know very much," she added modestly, "but I think I can perhaps stop the bleeding, and thus, by God's help, save his life, or prevent his growing weaker before the doctor comes."

"Are you indeed willing to try, dear mademoiselle?" cried both Dimitri Romanovitch and his wife. "How kind! God give you success! Come then at once; Constantin," turning to the butler, "lead the way."

And in a moment more Mary Cornwall, stooping over the unconscious form of poor Collia, had begun to realise how quickly an answer had come to her prayer for usefulness. Her own cheek was well-nigh as pale as that of the fainting lad, but her sensitive lips did not tremble, and there was a light in her deep grey eyes, and a quiet purpose in the very movements of her slender hands, which showed that her feelings were well under command.

CHAPTER II.

THE SILVER STAR.

"SEE, madame! He opens his eyes; he is conscious!" Anna Petrovna crossed herself before the little *Obraz*[25] in the corner with devout gratitude; then she turned to Mary, who, now that the strain was over, showed signs of weariness. The bleeding had been profuse—dangerously so—and there had been some delay in getting together the necessary appliances. But at last, with great care, and not a little skill, the flow was staunched,[26] a cordial[27] administered, and the boy revived. Collia's glance rested upon Mary's face, which was still bending over him, her eyes watching for

[25] [**O**-braz] Icon; image.
[26] Stopped.
[27] Stimulating medicine.

the first faint tinge of red in the round young cheeks.

"It is the English lady!" he exclaimed. "What can I be lying here for? What has happened?" and he tried to rise, but fell back again, half fainting.

"Please tell him, madame, to keep quiet," said Mary. "Above all, he must not move that arm."

"Lie still, Collia," said his mistress in Russian. "Have a little patience, and thou wilt soon be able to go to thy room. Ah, Feodor"—and Anna Petrovna turned towards the door—"come in and see how thy little son is getting on."

Feodor, the coachman, entered. A typical Russian was Feodor, and a magnificent man. He was about forty years of age, full six feet high, and with massive shoulders, deep chest, and straight, powerful limbs. His finely formed head was covered with a mass of crisp dark curling hair, parted in the middle, after the fashion of Russian peasants, and mingling at the side of his face with a heavy, wavy, silky beard, which swept in rich abundance down almost to his breast. The face was a good face too, as well as handsome, and the whole bearing of the man had a

quiet dignity which became him well.

As he saw his son's face turn towards him with a smile, there came a light into his eyes, and a look of love which reminded Mary of old pictures of the saints, which she had seen in St. Petersburg churches during the two or three days that she had been there, before continuing her journey to the interior.

"I shall soon be well again, father!" said the boy; "this angel has been curing me; indeed, both she and our Barynia are true angels. I only hope they will not spread their wings and fly away some fine day."

"Forgive him for his boyish freedom," exclaimed Feodor; "he is but a child, and he has no mother. And allow me to thank you and this young lady for all your goodness to my boy. May God give you health—you that try to keep the life in poor ignorant peasants like us! When may I take my Collia away, Anna Petrovna? He will only trouble you here."

"You must ask our English lady doctor here," replied Anna Petrovna. "I do not know when it would be safe to move him; what do you say, mademoiselle?"

"I should not move him to-night, madame," replied Mary. "He ought to be

quite quiet till to-morrow morning, for fear of fever coming on. His father or some one had better be with him, in case he requires anything; or I will stay with pleasure, if you prefer it."

"*You*, mademoiselle? No, indeed!" replied Anna Petrovna, "your face shows that you have already done as much as your strength will permit. Give us our directions, and then go to rest, my dear, and God be with you!"

"Should he be feverish or restless, madame, I should put a bandage, wet with ice water, upon his head, and soon I think he ought to have a little light food. An egg beaten up with milk, or a small cup of clear soup."

"But he is fasting, mademoiselle," exclaimed Anna Petrovna. "How can he take eggs or milk, or meat soup?"

"By my creed, madame," replied Mary gently, "it is not what we eat or do not eat that displeases or pleases our Heavenly Father, but the spirit in which we live and act. Health is God's gift, and so is every kind of food; I cannot but think it is God's will that we should eat what may best sustain our bodies, and make us strong to serve Him."

"There is reason in that, mademoiselle,"

said Anna Petrovna thoughtfully; "and, after all, the lad is but a child compared with some of us, and his fasting does not count for much. Besides, in this case his food is medicine, is it not?"

"Indeed it is," rejoined Mary, earnestly. "Thank you, madame, for not being offended with my plain speaking; and now allow me to wish you good-night."

"Good-night, mademoiselle; nay, good-night, *my child*, for you have grown nearer to me than I could have thought possible in these few short hours." And the warm-hearted lady drew the girl towards her, and softly kissed the pale cheek.

The tears flashed into Mary's eyes at this unexpected touch of tenderness, so un-English in its spontaneousness. Gratefully she raised Anna Petrovna's jewelled hand to her lips, looking the thankfulness that she could not otherwise express. Then, very happy at heart, though somewhat weary in body, she sought her own room, and slept soundly till morning.

From that eventful evening until the time of Collia's complete recovery, no one touched the wounded arm but Mary, if

indeed we except the doctor, who came once only, and on that occasion said that the English lady had done all that was needful, and that he should with confidence leave the case in her hands.

It would be difficult to say how the lad looked forward to Mary's daily visits to his rooms over the stable—rooms which he and his father shared. Indeed, the gratitude and devotion of the boy were quite touching, and as he recovered he was always trying to show his feelings by some act of thoughtfulness or some little attention. Before Christmas Day he was up and about again, and fast regaining the roses that had paled in his cheeks; and the first time he went out he managed to snare a young squirrel, which he brought as a present to Mary in a cage of his own manufacture—for he was an ingenious young fellow, and could do more with a few bits of wood and some old wire than many a lad with the most ample and expensive materials.

From interacting with her pupils, and also during her frequent visits to Collia, Mary had managed to pick up a good many Russian words; and having a natural aptitude for languages, she soon gained sufficient to make herself understood;

lamely enough at first, it must be confessed, but the Russians never laugh at a beginner's mistakes, as our more civilised English do, but help the strugglers to find the right words, while they get at the meaning in a wonderfully quick fashion. Of course the conversations could not be very lengthy, nor could they embrace a very wide variety of subjects, but such as they were, they were highly satisfactory to the parties concerned.

Christmas Eve came at last, the trees having been cut in preparation some time before, and kept in a cool place, to prevent their changing colour or shedding their needles.

Olga and little Vera had not been allowed to enter the small drawing-room ever since one of the firs had been carried in; and in spare hours, Anna Petrovna, Katinka, the head nurse, Avdotya, the maid, and even Mary herself, had been hard at work with preparations for the Christmas tree, and with the arrangement of presents bought in St. Petersburg months before on purpose for this occasion.

Quite a number of guests arrived at the early hour of five, many of them having driven over thirty versts from

neighbouring estates. Tea and clear soup were at once handed round, as sledge after sledge drove up with its freight of bright-faced, merry visitors; and soon the big drawing-room was thronged with young and old relatives or intimate friends of the Roukassoffs.

At half-past six o'clock, the hitherto carefully shut doors of the small drawing-room were thrown open, and a brilliant sight greeted the eyes of those who had been waiting in eager expectation. For there, majestically rising to the very ceiling, its dark spiral branches stretched abroad, laden with every conceivable toy, sweet-meat, and fruit, and glittering with little mirrors, reflecting lamps and wax candles, stood the tree, a perfect blaze of light and colour, while its topmost peak supported a silver star bearing a mysterious inscription, the letters of which flashed in the many twinkling lights.

Pushed close to the wall, and forming two sides of a square, were arranged tables covered with white cloths, upon which were displayed parcels of every imaginable size and shape, from a tiny ring box to a great portmanteau.[28]

Each member of the family and every

[28] A large traveling bag made of stiff leather.

guest had some present provided for them; and when the tree had been sufficiently admired, Dimitri Romanovitch and Anna Petrovna proceeded to distribute the gifts.

The husband's and wife's presents to each other could not well be brought into the drawing-room, as Dimitri Romanovitch had purchased for his lady a beautiful sledge and horse for her own special use; while Anna Petrovna had provided new furniture for the dressing-room of her lord and master. But each handed to the other a written description of his or her gift, and these papers were read aloud, amid the applause and merry laughter of the whole party.

Olga Roukassoff, Mary's elder pupil, received from her parents a number of works by standard authors—Russian, French, and German; while little Vera was thrown into ecstasies of delight by the gift of an enormous wax doll dressed as a bride, and with a whole trousseau[29] packed up in a wonderful doll's trunk.

"Nor, my dear mademoiselle, have you been forgotten," said Anna Petrovna, pointing to a large, soft-looking parcel

[29] A bride's personal clothing, accessories, and linens.

lying on one of the tables, and turning at the same time with the kindest of smiles to Miss Cornwall.

With trembling fingers Mary untied the string, when what was her surprise to see a beautiful fur paletôt,[30] lined with fox skin, and with a handsome collar and muff of dark Siberian sable, and a cap to match. A generous gift indeed, and one which the rigour[31] of a Russian climate made doubly acceptable.

"This is in token that we consider you as belonging to our family, mademoiselle," said Dimitri Romanovitch. "Please accept it with my wife's best wishes, and my own too;" and he shook hands cordially with Mary, who, quite overwhelmed with surprise, and touched by such kindness and generosity, had hard work to conceal her emotion.

When each guest had received a gift, the tree began to be despoiled[32] of its riches, and the children's piles of treasures grew bigger and bigger, as fruit, *bonbonnières*,[33] and knick-knacks of

[30] A lady's outer garment, frock with hood, or overcoat.

[31] *Chiefly British:* rigor; severity; harshness.

[32] Robbed; deprived.

[33] Wedding favours; small trinket boxes filled with delicate confections.

every description were added. At last the tree stood nearly bare, excepting for the lights and the ornaments, and the beautiful silver star that still shone in solitary brightness upon its central point.

Suddenly there was a little noise of whispering outside the door, and the butler came in and said a few words in a low tone to Anna Petrovna. The lady nodded and smiled, and the man retired, but no sooner had he done so than Collia entered in his holiday suit of black velveteen with a scarlet shirt and trowsers, and high-heeled polished boots. His face was flushed, his eyes sparkling. He placed a double ladder near the trunk of the tree, stepped lightly up, and disengaging the star from the branch came down again, bearing the trophy in his hand. Unabashed by the many eyes bent upon him, he came forward, and presented the star to Mary, saying in a few words, simple enough for even her to understand their meaning, that this was a remembrance from all the servants of the house, in token of their appreciation of the English lady's kindness and skill.

But this was the last drop in poor Mary's cup, a drop which made it overflow; and she could only give one grateful, tearful

look, first at Collia, then at the faces that clustered together in the passage outside the door, as she pinned the star brooch, with its inscription, into her dress, ere she quite broke down, and had to run away to her own room.

She had not been there long, however, when she heard a strange tumult[34] in the house, very different from the happy sound that had hitherto reached her ears; and above the other noises rose shrieks, which were only too much like little Vera's voice.

Full of apprehension, Mary hurried back, meeting in the hall a mixed crowd of guests and servants, while in the centre stood the master of the house, holding little Vera in his arms. One sleeve and part of the waist of her white dress were charred and black, while her fair wee face and golden head rested helplessly upon her father's broad shoulder. She had fainted as he carried her.

"Ah, here you are, thank God, mademoiselle!" exclaimed Anna Petrovna; "you can tell us what to do. Some curse must surely be upon us, for even our Prazdniks bring only misfortune. The child stretched out her arm over one

[34] Noise; disturbance; commotion; confusion.

of the lights of the tree, we suppose, to reach something that had been left on a branch, and see how she is burnt, my poor little dove, my youngest, my baby!"

"It would be well to send someone at once for the doctor, madame," said Mary, her self-command returning with the demand for it. "In such cases the shock to the system is almost more to be dreaded than the actual injury. And meanwhile let us lay the child down somewhere, and see whether or not the burns are serious. Take courage, madame, she may be far less hurt than you fear."

"Her father extinguished the fire very quickly with this shawl," said Anna Petrovna, "but still I think she is sadly burnt."

While Mary silently cut away the clothes from the insensible little form before her, and applied strips of old soft linen, soaked in olive oil, Dimitri Romanovitch strode in among his servants and said: "Listen, children! Who of you will take out the spare troika and my fastest horses, and fetch the doctor?"

Half a dozen eager voices shouted, "Barrin, Barrin, Dimitri Romanovitch, send me! Send me!"

The master's eye passed from one to

another of the anxious faces, and at last rested upon Collia.

"Thy father cannot well be spared from his home duties to-night," said he, "for the horses of our guests must be cared for, and he will need the help of the grooms. But thou canst go, Collia, now thine arm is healed. Hasten then, my boy, get ready, drive well, as I know well thou canst, and bring the doctor here. And, hear me, should he not be at home, lose no time, but drive on to the next town and fetch another doctor thence. Spare not the horses, for my little child's life may be at stake."

Collia flushed high with pride and pleasure at being selected for so important an errand. He kissed his master's hand, and ran off to get himself ready, while his father, accompanied by the second coachman and head groom, went to harness the horses.

In twenty minutes he was speeding along the smooth snowy road, behind the long swinging gallop of three fine, fresh horses, his young heart bounding with a mingled feeling of excitement and natural pride, and without a thought of the dangers that might be about him during his wild, lonely night-drive, through dense

woods and over barren wastes; dangers not by any means imaginary, and which it will be ours to relate in the course of the next chapter.

CHAPTER III.

LEFT FOR DEAD.

IT was about eight o'clock when Collia started. No moon or stars were visible, for the heavens were shrouded with snow clouds which had been gathering and lowering all day, and now threatened to shower down their burden ere long. A wind had sprung up in the last hour or two, and as it sighed and moaned among the dark, swaying tops of the pine-trees to the right of the road, or swept across the wide stretch of what had been marsh-land in the summer that lay to the left, a kind of solemn awe, a strange sense of loneliness, came over the lad, and involuntarily he recalled to memory some pictures that Mary had brought to his room one day to show him, and the

stories she told of them, and which were translated to him by little Vera, who had accompanied her.

They had been Bible scenes, chiefly drawn from the life of Christ. One was a picture of the Saviour walking upon the water towards the ship containing His awestruck disciples. In another, Jesus was alone upon the mountain, kneeling in prayer; and again the same beautiful face, the same gracious form, but this time weighed down by the burden and sorrows of Gethsemane, and with the terrible coming trial of the Cross.

"And she said," thought the lad, recalling some of the young English lady's translated explanations, "that the Lord, who Himself knew what loneliness was, and who, here on this earth, had felt sorrow and pain, is never far from any one of us, even from poor ignorant boys like me. I wonder if He is near now!" And at the thought of the Divine presence Collia crossed himself devoutly, as he had been taught to do.

The young yamshchik[35] had been driving fast for half an hour or more, and had just pulled up his horses to give them a moment or two of breathing space, when

[35] [yamsh-**chick**] Coachman.

he heard a shout, and almost before he had time to look round, a three-horse sledge dashed up from the left. The sledge contained three men, whom Collia eyed suspiciously. The times were hard, and there were plenty of bad characters about; and though the boy himself had nothing to lose but his life, his master's horses were valuable animals, and the troika was new and very handsome. Collia knew that it was no unusual thing for passengers to be stopped on these lonely roads, and for their conveyances and horses to be taken from them; so he kept his eyes open, especially when he saw the man on the side nearest to him stealthily unfastening the apron of the sledge, so that he could leap out in a moment.

"Who art thou, youngster?" said one of them.

"I am Collia, servant of Dimitri Romanovitch Roukassoff," replied the lad promptly, hoping that the mention of his master's well-known name would inspire these people with some respect. He would not have stayed an instant to parley[36] with them, had he not known that every moment of rest would enable

[36] Talk or negotiate with an enemy.

his horses to run the faster and the more enduringly when he again started them in a gallop.

And now the man whom Collia had answered turned to his companions, and a whispered colloquy[37] took place. The next minute the fellow nearest to the troika leaped from the sledge, his companions preparing to follow him. But Collia waited to see no more. He gave the rein to his horses, at the same time lashing them for the first time with the whip, and shouting to excite them further, and the troika dashed forward at a tremendous pace, but not before the boy caught the report of a pistol, and half felt, half heard, a bullet whistle past him in the darkness.

Once off, Collia knew that there was but little danger, unless, indeed, a horse were to fall. "But that, God forbid!" he exclaimed, as the thought crossed his mind. His light sledge and three fast horses could distance any ordinary vehicle with ease; so after a few minutes' full gallop he suffered[38] his horses to settle down into a pace still rapid, but regular and less breakneck than at first—a pace which

[37] Conference; conversational exchange.

[38] Permitted; allowed.

he meant to keep up until he reached the town.

When Collia arrived at his destination, the doctor had just returned from his rounds, and hearing the lad's story, he quickly provided himself with such things as he thought might be necessary or useful, while he made the young yamshchik swallow a glass of hot tea.

About twenty minutes from the time when the troika drew up at the door, it was off again, with the horses' heads turned towards home.

More willingly than ever went the noble animals, and Collia had to use no whip to urge them along the way they had come. The road was crisp and smooth, but the snow clouds were thicker than ever, and before five versts of the homeward journey had been traversed the flakes began to fall thick and fast. The wind, too, blew strong and keen, dashing the snow in the travellers' faces, and nearly blinding Collia, who, of course, being in the driver's place in front, got the full unbroken force of the storm.

But on and on went the gallant horses, shaking the flakes from their manes and their forelocks, puffing and snorting defiantly, till their breath rose about them

like clouds of steam, while they galloped, neck to neck, steadily forward, Collia calling to them by name, once and again, to encourage them and remind them that he was near.

Suddenly the sledge came to a dead stand. The horses had wildly swerved aside from something in the road, and after a single plunge remained motionless. The young coachman sprang to the ground, putting the reins into the doctor's hands for the moment.

LEFT FOR DEAD.

There, right in the centre of the road-track, was what looked at first sight like a mound of snow; but as the lad pushed and scraped some of it aside, he discovered

that underneath lay a human body.

"What have we here?" exclaimed Collia. "Mr. Doctor, have you not a cordial, or some vodka, or something of that sort with you? We ought to be hurrying on, but I cannot leave a man to die in the snow or be eaten by the wolves. And he is not dead; his heart beats yet."

The doctor pulled out a flask from his medical knapsack, and Collia knelt down by the prostrate from of the insensible traveller, and managed to pour a small portion of the reviving cordial down his throat.

But at that moment, and before Collia could spring to his feet, a wild melancholy howl mingled with the moaning of the wind, and seemed to be met and chorused by other howls far away in the distance; and the horses, hearing and recognising the voice of the animal dreaded by them more, perhaps, than any other, with a wild snort of terror made a violent dash forward, and in an instant were out of sight in a cloud of snow, along the homeward road, quite unmanageable by the startled doctor, who was wholly unaccustomed to the guidance of such fiery steeds.

"What shall I do now?" exclaimed

Collia, as the troika disappeared, and he found himself standing by the helpless stranger in the midst of a wild waste of snowy landscape, without arms of any kind save the small axe which he always carried, without a conveyance, and with the additional responsibility of his new charge.

Of one thing, however, he felt convinced; that the horses were sure to go instinctively in the direction of home, and thus, if the doctor could obtain sufficient mastery over them to keep them from rushing out of the beaten track, and upsetting the sledge over the trunk of a tree or over a stone, the troika and its occupant would arrive ere long, and poor little Vera's safety would not be endangered by further delays.

"And as for me," said Collia to himself, "the doctor will tell our Barrin where I am, and our master is not one to blame me for staying a moment to help a man lost in the snow. They will send back for me as soon as they can, and meanwhile I must get this poor individual on his legs." And once more Collia knelt down by the man, and he began to chafe[39] his hands, and offer words of comfort.

[39] Warm by rubbing.

Presently a deep sigh broke from the stranger's lips. Then he opened his eyes, and said hoarsely, "Where am I? I thought I was dying! Where is my sledge and horse?"

"God knows, sir, if you had one, it is not to be seen now; all the sledges seem to be running away to-night. But you are not dying, I think," (and here Collia gave a little chuckle at the idea) "you have only been insensible from the cold."

"No, I remember everything now. Where are those men—the robbers?"

"Ah, robbers! Did you meet some robbers, Barrin?"

"I should think I did. They stopped me, and stole my horse and sledge, and my revolver—not until I had wounded one of them, however—and my watch, and shawl, and money; and not content with this, they must needs give me a knock on the head, and leave me here insensible."

"Were they three men in a big three-horse sledge?" questioned Collia eagerly.

"Yes, just so, the villains!" exclaimed the stranger; and while he spoke he rose and shook off the snow, and Collia saw that he was a handsome, superior-looking, gentlemanly man, perhaps thirty-five years of age, with fine bold features,

clear cut and aristocratic in form, but with a sort of half-sarcastic, half-reckless expression, which made his face one to be remembered.

"But how did you get here?" said he to Collia; "and how is it that you are here all alone in the middle of the night? Have you, too, been robbed?"

"No; nothing quite so bad. The same calamities do not happen to everybody, or this would be a dull world, with nothing to talk about." And then Collia told his story, and the stranger listened attentively.

"And now, sir," said Collia, as he finished his recital, "if you find that you can use your legs, would it not be as well for us to be moving on towards home? And if you will forgive my freedom, will you not be pleased to take my coat? I have a sheepskin underneath, and shall be quite warm."

"Thanks, brother," replied Collia's companion, and with a gigantic effort, in which the boy assisted him, he succeeded in squeezing himself into the yamshchik's fur-lined dress, though nothing would persuade it to button over the stranger's ample chest.

They walked on for some little time,

when suddenly he said, "That is the fourth time I have noticed you looking over your shoulder, my boy. What is it you see? I am somewhat short-sighted, and am giddy, besides, from the blow on my head, and can perceive very little except snow."

"It is nothing really alarming," replied Collia, "only I think that two or three wolves are following us. Two or three are no matter, but should more join them it might not be so comfortable, as they are hungry at this season."

"What had we better do?" asked the stranger. "I have always lived in cities, and am not very much at home in wilds like these."

"We had better keep straight along the road at present," answered the lad, "and after a short time we shall come to a wood; then if worst should come to worst, and the creatures seem inclined to attack us, we can climb trees. Being just at the roadside in this wood, we should not miss seeing any sledge that may be sent by my master to find us, and we should be safe beside."

"But how can anyone, except perhaps a squirrel, climb such trees as those of which the forests here are composed?"

asked the stranger incredulously. "There are nothing but pine and fir trees, with, for the most part, round smooth trunks and hardly any branches till one gets half-way up."

Collia smiled.

"Look here, Barrin," said he, "this is my constant companion;" and he took from under his sheepskin a small but well-made axe. "I call my axe Ivan Philipitch, after my good friend the steward, because, like him, it is always ready and true. With this I cut a few notches in the tree, and up I go like a cat, and you would do the same." And as he spoke, Collia again glanced over his shoulder, adding, "Yes, Barrin, and there may after all be occasion to test the truth of my words, for the wolves are more in number than they were, and are following closer. Had we fire-arms there would be no danger, for a shot would disperse them, but now we must simply get out of their way."

"Shall we run, so as to get to the place more quickly?" questioned Collia's companion.

"On no account, sir. That would be the signal for the wolves to dash down upon us in a moment. No, we will keep steadily on till we come to the wood. The

brutes are cowards, and take a long time in making up their minds to attack, and we shall be able to get to the place in time. Why, I knew a fellow who walked two versts backwards, and saved his life by keeping his face always turned to the wolves that were following him."

Another twenty minutes' walk, during which the howls of the wolves were becoming more and more unpleasantly audible, brought our travellers to the wood; and coming to a stop here, Collia selected a fine, solid-looking fir tree growing close to the road, and began to notch it. It was hard frozen, and coated with snow, but it could not resist the blows of the sharp metal, and as the strokes of the axe rang out into the frosty air, and the crushed and broken bits of stiff bark and ice fell, following each blow, the wolves stopped and listened, uncertain whether some trap were not being prepared for them; for they are wary creatures, who well know how to take care of number one.

At last the notches were cut, and Collia insisted upon the stranger mounting first, which at once he commenced to do, dragging his stiff limbs slowly and painfully up, and grasping the tree in those places where Collia had purposely chipped off

the outer slippery coating to make the precarious hold easier.

Meanwhile Collia remained below, alternately watching the ascending form of his companion and the movements of the wolves, who, having grown restless and fearful of their prey escaping them, were now approaching, a silent and stealthy company, and looking, for all the world, like dark, wicked demon shadows on the pure snowy way.

CHAPTER IV.

UP A TREE.

IT was well that Collia was more agile in his movements than his companion, or perhaps here our story of him and his adventures might have ended once and for all.

No sooner had he placed his foot on the first notch of the tree and begun to haul himself up, than a simultaneous yell broke from the savage watchers, and they made a rush to the place. One of them even gave a great spring after the retreating form, and its steel-trap jaws snapped sharply only a few inches beneath Collia's foot.

"Now thank God!" exclaimed our young hero as he swung his light form

safely into the fork of a strong branch, and found himself close to the stranger, who had secured a similar bough for his perch; "now our friends the wolves can sit there till they freeze, for all we care."

"Yes, that's all very fine," rejoined Collia's companion. "But have you reflected that we are much more likely to freeze than *they?* And for my own part, I cannot help feeling that an hour or two of this tree business will so congeal[40] my blood that I shall tumble off right into the creatures' very jaws—sorry as I should be to oblige them to that extent, after their rude behaviour."

"Nay, Barrin, tumble off you shall not," rejoined Collia cheerily; "for if you become too cold to hold yourself on, I will keep you from falling; or should we both fall, we can do it together, and crush at least three of our friends the wolves down below. I only wish I had my garmonia, Barrin, and I would play to them. Folks call me Musician Collia at home. Music excites wolves—so they say—and it would be fun to watch them. Courage, sir," said the lad as he saw the despairing look on the stranger's face. "If the troika has reached home, our people will be coming

[40] Freeze; change from a fluid state to a solid state.

soon to look for us, and my master will be so glad to welcome you, and you will see my mistress, Anna Petrovna, and Olga Dimitrievna,[41] the elder Báryshnia,[42] and Vera Dimitrievna, the little one, and the dear English lady, who has no Russian name, but whom I call Mees Mye."

"And why do you call the English lady *dear?*" asked the stranger, amused with Collia's enthusiasm. And then the boy told the story of his accident, and of a loving heart wishful to render all honour to her who had helped him in his hour of need.

"Well, then," said the stranger, chafing one of his limbs with his spare hand, while he glanced down at the wolves, still sitting on their haunches in a circle round the tree, with hungry smiles on their upturned faces, "well, then, Collia, if we don't get frozen to death, or gobbled up by those devils down there, I may have the chance of seeing your paragon[43] of perfection."

[41] [Di-**mi**-tri-yev-na] Literally *daughter of Dimitri*; the female form of the patronymic Dimitrievich. Russians do not have middle names, but use the patronymic instead, especially among close friends as an intimate form of address.

[42] [**Bar**-ysh-nia] An eligible young lady; a daughter of a Barin and Barynia.

[43] Ideal; model of excellence.

"Indeed, I hope so," exclaimed Collia heartily; "you will love her at once, Barrin, just as everyone does who looks at her sweet face."

"May be," muttered the stranger, incredulously. "And pray how does this English angel come to be at your master's house?"

"Oh, she is the governess," replied Collia, "and she teaches English to the two young ladies."

"Ah! only a governess!" said the stranger, a little contemptuously.

"And none the less an angel for that!" responded Collia, a little hotly, detecting the shade of slight[44] in the tones and words, and resenting it on behalf of his dear Mees Mye.

"Ah! well, have it your own way," said Collia's strange companion. "Were I not chilled to the bones, and feeling about as wretched as possible, I declare I could laugh at the pretty way in which you said that. When you have lived as long as I have, Collia, and have seen—if you ever have the chance—as much of the world, you will get over thinking that every pretty English governess is an angel."

"But it is for her brave, kind, gentle

[44] Disrespect; deliberate discourtesy.

heart, and her skilful, tender hands, and not alone for her lovely face that we love her," replied Collia, more hotly still. "And then she tells us of the good God who cares for us, and of His Son who died on the cross for our sins, and of all the wonderful things He did."

"But you knew about God and Christ before, did you not? That is our religion too."

"Yes, Barrin, of course I knew something—enough to think of God when I bowed and crossed myself before the icon[45] on our wall or in the church; but I had never heard the stories of Jesus Christ's life on earth; that was all new, and oh, so interesting! And it comforts and helps one, too," added Collia, "and it gives me courage to think how near He is to us, even now."

The boy was so simple in his faith, and so thoroughly in earnest, that the stranger was touched. The sarcastic smile that had curled his handsome lips passed away, and his keen eyes moistened.

There was a pause for a long time. Both Collia and his companion were stiffening with the cold, though the stiff snow had to some extent lessened the effect of the

[45] Image of the Christ, the Virgin Mary, or a saint.

wind upon their shivering bodies. Both were beginning to feel very drowsy, and were struggling against the sensation, fraught[46] as it was now with double danger, when Collia suddenly gave a great shout. His quick ears had caught the musical jingle of distant bells, and never was sound sweeter than this.

"Oh, Barrin! thank God! they come to fetch us. Hear the troika bells!"

And the watchful wolves, too, had heard approaching bells, and the galloping of horses' hoofs, and the cries of men, and they stole off and disappeared in the forest.

Collia put his fingers to his lips, and gave a shrill, prolonged whistle; then he swung himself down, and assisted his companion to descend. Both were standing at the roadside when a troika driven by Feodor, and another sledge by one of the grooms, came dashing up, and out of the latter sprang the steward and a man who was his assistant on the estate.

"Here we are!" shouted Collia, bounding towards his father, and, Russian-like, clasping him round the neck and kissing him on both cheeks. "Here we are, thank God! all safe; but it is rather a wonder, for—"

[46] Filled.

"Ah, well, thy story after; but now I must take this gentleman and thee home as fast as I can. Will the Barrin please to jump in?"

"I will ride in the other sledge, father," said Collia. "It is not proper for me to ride in the same sledge with a gentleman."

"Nonsense!" exclaimed the stranger, laughing. "After twice saving the Barrin's life, and lending him your coat, and walking with him, and sitting in a tree with him, and arguing with him right hotly about—you know what—it is too late to turn humble now, and decline to drive with me in your own master's sledge. Come beside me, Collia;" and the gentleman stepped in, and pulled the lad after him.

Then Feodor spoke to his horses, shook the reins, and the troika was off, passing the other sledge, and slipping swiftly and smoothly over the fresh-fallen snow.

There was no conversation on the road. The sense of relief was too great for speech, and the feeling of returning warmth was so delicious, as the companions in danger nestled under the bearskin apron of the sledge, that they felt almost as though they could have gone on thus for ever.

In what seemed to them an incredibly

short space of time, the troika glided up noiselessly and stood motionless before the grand front entrance of the house of Dimitri Romanovitch.

The master himself came into the hall to meet them; but as the stranger threw aside his fur cap and turned his face to the light, his host started with surprise, and bowed low, saying: "This is indeed a surprise! Your Highness does me too much honour in condescending to be my guest."

"Say not so, my friend," replied the new-comer with an amused smile; "I am glad to come to one whom I know, though, had you been a stranger, I do not see that I could have much choice. Even such modesty as yours must acknowledge that I am better and safer here than sitting in a tree in eight degrees of frost, with a snowstorm overhead, and wolves paying court below."

But Collia only caught the words, "Your Highness," and realising for the first time that this stranger whom he had rescued was one of whose rank he had been wholly ignorant, and to whom perhaps, in his ignorance, he had failed in respectful bearing, he came forward, and bending low, begged for forgiveness.

The stranger laughed loud and long.

"Collia," said he, "my being a prince did not save me from robbers; the wind blew on me, the snow covered me, the frost chilled me, the wolves hungered for me no less because I was noble. So, since my rank has shown itself of so little real importance, we will please forget it for the present. Thou couldest not have done more for me, child, had I been Alexander the Second[47] himself."

"But may I make so bold as to ask," said Dimitri Romanovitch, "what could have taken your Highness out into these wilds, unattended even by a yamshchik?"

"A secret mission, which I cannot explain even to *you*, my worthy host," replied the Prince somewhat coldly. "But happily, though the robbers took my money, they left me my papers, which were sewn into the lining of my vest. And now, my friend," changing his voice and manner suddenly, "may I ask for some supper and a bed? and then in the morning I must further tax your kindness for the loan of a small sum of money and a sledge, that I may return to those whose

[47] As tsar of Russia, Alexander II introduced reforms that included limited emancipation of the serfs (1818-1881).

messenger I am, and give an account of myself. On the morrow, too, I shall have a proposal to make, which I hope may meet with your full consent and approval."

CHAPTER V.

HIS HIGHNESS'S OFFER.

THE next day Dimitri Romanovitch was informed that his guest was not well enough to leave his room. The rough treatment he had received at the hands of the robbers, followed by the exposure and anxiety, had produced a reaction, which was hardly wonderful in one wholly unused to hardship.

The doctor, however, after attending to little Vera's burns (which happily turned out to be only slight), had spent the night in the house, and on visiting his new patient in the morning he saw no reason for anxiety, and took his leave in the middle of the day, after giving the Prince a dose

of quinine,[48] and telling him to keep quiet for the present.

By the afternoon the illustrious guest was already so much better as to be up and partially dressed. And having sent a message to his host that he desired to see him, he arrayed himself in a gorgeous Circassian[49] dressing-gown, which had been lent him, and awaited with some impatience the visit of Dimitri Romanovitch.

"I told you last night that I had a proposition to make," said the Prince, when his host, after a cordial salutation,[50] and the usual inquiries about health, seated himself in an opposite arm-chair, in an attitude and with an expression of profound and respectful attention.

"Your Highness will find me ready to listen to anything you may have to say," replied Dimitri Romanovitch.

"Good! Well, I have taken an uncommon fancy to that little yamshchik of yours—Collia, or Nikolai, for I presume that is his real name; and I want you to

[48] Medicine that reduces fever, pain, and inflammation.

[49] [ser-**kash**-uh n / ser-**kash**-ee-uh n] From Circassia, a region in southern Russia bordering the Black Sea.

[50] Warm, friendly greeting.

let me have him, to take with me to St. Petersburg. I need one trusty servant about me—one who will not lie, nor steal, nor take a bribe, nor cheat; and from what I have seen of this lad, he is a rare specimen amongst us Russians, and is thoroughly honest. He has a good heart, too, and attaches himself easily and warmly, and is not afraid of speaking the truth on behalf of those whom he loves."

"Your Highness is not mistaken in the opinion you have formed of Collia," replied Dimitri Romanovitch. "He is all that you say—but—"

"Ah! I felt sure that a "but" was coming, my worthy host," said the Prince laughing. "Well, what may this *but* be?"

"It seems almost more than rude—in fact, ungrateful—not to accept unconditionally and with thankfulness a position which any lad might be proud to hold," replied Dimitri Romanovitch. "At the same time, though I am running the risk of provoking your Highness's displeasure, I must say that I think the boy too young for a responsible situation, and I fear that he might not be proof[51] against the many temptations that would be continually surrounding him. Besides

[51] Able to withstand.

this, he is the only son of my coachman, Feodor, who has been in my family for many years, and I think it would almost break the father's heart to let Collia go."

"Yet fathers all the world over have to let their boys go; they do it every day of the year," remarked the Prince, dryly. "And if your Feodor loves his son, and really desires his advancement in life, will he not be glad to hear of a good opening for him?"

"There is much reason in what your Highness says," rejoined Dimitri Romanovitch; "but still—"

"Another *but*!" laughed the Prince. "Well, friend Roukassoff, what say you to calling the father in, and asking his opinion? If he makes any great objection, I promise to say no more about it."

"It is but fair," responded Dimitri Romanovitch; "and, indeed, your Highness pays the lad a great compliment in wishing to have him." Then he rang the bell, and told the footman to send Feodor at once.

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Meanwhile, Collia had been the hero of the servants' hall and kitchen, where he had been entertaining all the domestics

with glowing accounts of the previous night. In justice to the lad, however, we must say that he himself did not figure over-prominently in his recital.

"It is all very strange and wonderful, Collia," said Ivan Philipitch, who had come in and heard the lad's story. "And that this snow-buried, half-killed stranger should turn out to be a prince and acquaintance of our Barrin is like a tale in a book. Things did not happen so when *I* was young. But Nadeshda dropped a knife yesterday, and I said to her, 'There will be guests,' and that, of course, had nothing to do with the party for the Christmas tree; and she answered, 'Yes, Vania,[52] and it will be a Barrin! for all the world knows that had a fork or a spoon fallen, then would the guests have been ladies."[53]

"But be sure of this," said the old butler, "that these adventures of thine, Collia, will not end here. Not for nothing did Ivan Philipitch's axe spare to hew off thine arm on the night that he cut the Yollki. If his accustomed strength had been put into that stroke, we should have had thee, child, without thine arm,

[52] A nickname for Ivan.

[53] An example of Russian superstitions.

or more likely lost thee altogether; for even our English lady here could not give thee a new arm, or glue on the old one, though God has verily gifted her with a light hand to heal the sick."

"It is true. May God give her health!" said Collia solemnly; and there was a fervent response of "God give it!" from several of the other servants.

Just then the footman came into the hall and said, "Our Barrin and his Highness the Prince wish to see Collia in the Prince's room."

"Ah!" exclaimed the steward triumphantly; "what said I but now to thee, my child? Thou wilt believe old Ivan Philipitch another time."

"Nay," remarked the butler, "you make a mistake, Ivan Philipitch. It was *I* that foretold a future for this boy; you but spoke to him of the strangeness of his adventures."

The steward flushed a little: he did not like being contradicted, but he knew that the butler was right; however, like a wise man, he only said, "Well, and what will this Prince do for our Collia, I wonder?"

"If he presents thee, my Collia, with a thousand roubles,[54] remember that

[54] [**roo**-b*uh* lz] Russia's basic unit of money.

Yakof was ever thy friend," remarked our acquaintance of the first chapter, with a facetious[55] grin.

"And thou wilt not forget that I have set my heart on a pair of garnet earrings and a new necklace," whispered pretty Sonnia, the kitchen-maid.

"And that *I* have been sighing for years for a dozen silver tea-spoons to bequeath to my children, who will then, when I am gone, remember that they had a mother," said the laundress, who lived in the house, and had been in the Roukassoff family for a long time.

"Be quiet! all of you," cried the steward, with authority, "and let the boy go to those who send for him; should he rise one day to be a great man, he is not one to forget his friends."

Then Collia pressed through the circle that had closed around him, and betook himself to the Prince's apartment, where he was surprised to find his father.

Feodor was looking very pale, and his broad chest was heaving with emotion.

Dimitri Romanovitch raised his head as the lad entered, and said, "Collia, his Highness has sent for thee to speak about something concerning thy future.

[55] Humourous; not meant to be taken seriously.

Thy father is willing that thou shouldest decide for thyself: he will not urge thee one way or another."

"Good morning, my companion in affliction!" said the Prince, nodding pleasantly to poor Collia, who was feeling rather shy and frightened, and stood there in his scarlet shirt and high boots, trembling a little at what might be coming.

"Look at me well, Collia," continued the Prince, fixing his keen eyes upon the lad's face. "Look at me well, and say if, after all we went through together last night, and all that thy kind heart and brave nature prompted thee to do for a lonely, helpless stranger—thou wilt be willing to serve me as faithfully now I am a prince?"

Collia made no reply. He was bewildered. What was all this about serving a prince, and what had it to do with the adventures of the previous night, which, thank God! were now over?

"The child understands not, your Highness," murmured Feodor.

"Then explain to him yourself; he will better comprehend the voice he has known from his birth."

Feodor came a little nearer, and turning towards Collia said, in the deep, low

voice that was natural to him, but which trembled a little now with emotion, "Little son, his Highness puts before thee a great honour, and one which, if thou conduct thyself as becomes a lad brought up in the household of Dimitri Romanovitch Roukassoff, may lead to thine advancement. He is so good as to wish thee to enter his service, and to accompany him to St. Petersburg."

Collia stared with great round eyes. For a moment he spoke not; then he said, brokenly, "The Prince?—me—Collia!—St. Petersburg!" But as the full importance of what he had heard dawned upon his mind, the lad turned very pale, and, grasping Feodor's hand, leaned his curly head against the broad shoulder, saying, like the mere child that he was, "But, oh, father, how could I leave thee? I, who have only thee, and no mother! I am but a boy, thy little son still—oh, father!"

The tears came into Feodor's dark eyes as he passed his arm round the lad's shoulders, and let him hide his face on his breast.

Dimitri Romanovitch cleared his throat ominously, and he blew his nose with unheard-of violence, while a tell-tale moisture glistened even in the keen eyes of the Prince himself.

Presently the master of the house said, "Think well, Collia, decide not hastily; nay, my boy, go from us now, thou and thy father, take counsel together; speak also with Ivan Philipitch, and hear what he says, for he loves you both. Then come back and give us your answer. Am I taking too much upon myself, Prince, or will your Highness permit this?"

The Prince only replied by a grave smile and a ceremonious bow; but when the door had closed upon Feodor and Collia, he said, "It is a true-hearted, loving child, and I want him more than ever; I shall be disappointed indeed if he accept not my offer."

"There is little chance of his refusing it," replied Dimitri Romanovitch, half regretfully. He, too, loved the bright, open face of the lad who had been born under the shelter of his own roof, and he could not think without pain of the boy's departure.

The conversation flagged greatly for the next three-quarters of an hour, but at the end of that time the door opened, and Feodor appeared again, leading Collia, whose eyes were downcast and swollen with crying.

"We thankfully accept—with my

master's permission—your Highness's offer," said Feodor, in a strange, choked voice.

"May the child serve you faithfully, as he would have served Dimitri Romanovitch! Collia, kneel, my son, and make thy promise of obedience, and kiss the hand of thy new master."

COLLIA'S NEW MASTER.

CHAPTER VI.

NEW DUTIES AND AN OLD FACE.

THE parting was over; the long, weary journey was past, and Collia found himself in a grand palatial mansion, among numbers of retainers,[56] from the lowest to the highest rank.

Instead of the wide winter landscape, with its evergreen forests and miles of uninhabited waste, the streets of the modern Russian capital made the boundary line of vision; and the boy, after the free life he had been living, felt as though he could hardly breathe in the confinement of town atmosphere.

As yet Collia's work was undefined; indeed, so far from being marked out for

[56] Employees; servants in the household of a person of high rank.

him, he did not even know of what nature it was to be. The servants laughed and sneered at his country manners, and asked him where the Prince could have picked up such a "common little peasant," till sometimes, what with his sense of wrong, and the great loneliness that came over him, he wished he had never seen the Prince at all, but that he were back again in his old home, with his father and the many others whom he loved.

Mary Cornwall had given him, as a little parting present, a small Russian Testament, several copies of which she had obtained in St. Petersburg during her short stay there, and had taken with her to her situation, in the hope that they might prove useful. This to Collia was the first she had given away, and at his own request she had written his name on the fly-leaf, in English, thus: "Collia, with God's love, from Mary Cornwall."

During the first weeks of his new life, this Testament was Collia's sole comfort; for only when alone in his little slip of a room, with his Testament open before him, could he regain, even in a measure, the peace of mind he had enjoyed before.

Over and over again he wished himself

back on the Vallikin estate, and sometimes the homesickness was so strong, and the longing for his father so great, that he had fits of crying and sobbing like a child, and now and then he was on the point even of going to the Prince, and begging to be sent back to his old master.

As yet his dress was the same as that he had worn at home, and this was hardly the garb in which he could appear in the rooms frequented by the Prince and his more immediate attendants; so the poor boy remained in the kitchen and underservants' apartments, trying to help in any odd jobs of work there might be, but meeting with little kindness, and looked upon by most of his companions with contempt or suspicion.

One day, however, his master sent for him into his private cabinet,[57] and Collia gladly obeyed the summons, hoping that at last some change was impending, for anything would be better than the present state of things.

"Well, Collia," said Prince D——, "thou hast been here now over three weeks, and I have purposely left thee to thyself. What thinkest thou of thy chances of happiness in this, my home?"

[57] Private room or office.

Collia flushed scarlet.

"If your Highness only took me away for my happiness, may I beg to be sent back again at once?" he replied passionately. "This is no place for a poor boy like me. I have no work, and can be of no use to anyone."

The Prince smiled in his old sarcastic fashion. "Spoken like the child that thou art," he said, not unkindly. "But now tell me, Collia, whom among my dozens of servants hast thou chosen for thy friend? Fear not, boy, speak the truth."

"Then if your Highness bids me speak the truth, I can only say that not one of the people here would I have for a friend, even were they willing, which they are not."

"And why, pray?" asked the Prince.

"Because—because they—" but here Collia flushed again, left off speaking, and compressed his lips.

"Because they—" echoed the Prince, "because they—finish thy sentence, child!"

"Nay, your Highness, I have thought better of what I was about to say, and indeed it ill becomes a boy like me to speak of what concerns me not."

"As thou wilt," replied his master dryly.

"Well, then, as thou art tired of idleness, and hast, like Noah's dove of ancient memory, found no rest for the sole of thy foot in this deluge of lying and cheating, I propose to give thee a work—a work which *thou* only canst do, and for which thou wilt be answerable to me alone."

Collia's face brightened. The prospect of something definite to do, a recognised position, a responsible work, was very pleasant to him after the desultory[58] life he had been leading.

The Prince went on. "Thou shalt be dressed in the livery[59] of my footmen,[60] Collia, and shalt mix with my servants, and be as one of them, apparently sharing in their duties, and joining in their conversation; but thy *real* work shall be to keep eyes and ears open, to watch each dependant of mine, to mark all their ways, to listen to all their words, to note their friendships and their visitors, to write down what thou seest and hearest, and to repeat to me all that passes."

"In short, your Highness means that I

[58] Lacking consistency or order; disconnected; irregular.

[59] The uniform worn by servants.

[60] Men employed as servants in a large establishment to run errands, do chores, or attend a door or carriage.

am to be a *spy;* and, while pretending to be a simple footman, I am to be an informer against my fellow-servants, and their accuser if need be."

"Just so, Collia; thou art a quick, bright lad, and wilt, I can foresee, be very useful to me. Wilt thou then begin thy new duties at once?"

There was a moment's pause; then the boy said with a vehemence[61] which startled the Prince, "*Never!* your Highness! My father's son can never be a mean, traitorous spy. My father would sooner die than act so mean a part, and his son will strive to tread in his steps. Forgive me, my master, but in this I may not obey you;" and Collia bent low, but with pride in his humility. "Bid me sweep the streets, clean out your stables, or scour the saucepans in the kitchen; let me do the most menial work of the house, if it be your pleasure that I should; but bid me not do this great wrong, which would make life hateful to me, and bring such shame upon me that I could never look my honest father in the face again."

The Prince's countenance had darkened while the lad spoke, and he uttered an impatient exclamation. He was

[61] Intensity; forcefulness; energy; enthusiasm; zeal.

unaccustomed to opposition in any form, and he had fully expected that Collia, upon whom he had conferred so great an honour, would conform to his wishes and will in all things.

For a minute or two he was really angry. Then his wiser and calmer self asserted its claims, and he reflected that a boy who was bold enough to refuse to do what he felt to be mean and false and beneath him was likely to be brave and faithful under even the most trying circumstances; and that even Collia's objection to being a spy and reporter might be of service in another line of usefulness, as it would seal his lips when a word or two might mar the business in which his master was engaged. As he thought this out, the Prince's brow cleared.

"Be comforted, Collia," he said; "I think not the less highly of thee because thou hast the courage to say what thou believest. If this work for which I had intended thee is so distasteful, I will appoint thee another; and here remember the greatest secrecy is necessary, and to none but myself mayest thou speak of what I tell thee, or of whither[62] I send thee."

[62] What place; where.

"Your Highness has only to command," answered Collia, relieved at his master's kinder tone. "I am little more than a child, but I can be faithful. For the true Russian peasant, though he be but ignorant and simple, will lay down his life—and has done it ere now—for his master—so said my father; and if his Highness will trust poor Collia, his trust shall not be abused."

"I believe thee, child," replied the Prince, touched by the lad's earnestness, and giving him his hand to kiss in token of goodwill. "Now listen, Collia; thou art light of foot, and fleet; thou hast sense and courage; thou shalt, therefore, be my private and confidential messenger. For a few weeks thou shalt accompany the carriage or the sledge when I drive out, so as to learn thy way about the city. Ask the coachman—at the same time, observing well thyself—and he will tell thee the names of the streets, the palaces, the canals, the bridges and the gardens—all, in short, that thou requirest to know. Then, when thou art no longer a stranger in the streets of St. Petersburg, I will make use of thee to carry letters and papers and messages. And mark me well, Collia, according to thy intelligence, thy

faithfulness, thy silence, shall be thine advancement."

Collia once more bowed low, and leaving his master's cabinet repaired[63] to his own room, whither he was followed in an hour or so by the tailor employed by Prince D—— to make the liveries of his menservants, and who had come to measure the young peasant for a smart dress, which was to differ materially from that of the footmen and the pages, because the boy's work was distinct from theirs.

At the end of a few days the suit was ready, and also a fur coat, and a hat, not unlike in shape to that worn by ambassadors' *chasseurs.*[64]

Thus equipped, it was Collia's duty to accompany the Prince in his drives, which were sometimes to make calls on business, and sometimes for mere pleasure and an airing.[65] These latter drives consisted of a few turns, at a rapid pace, up and down the Nevsky Prospekt and Bolshaya Morskaya,[66] meeting the

[63] Travelled; returned; went.

[64] [sha-**surz**] Uniformed footmen; liveried attendants.

[65] A ride in the open air to promote health.

[66] [**Nev**-ski **Pros**-pect] [**Bol**-sha-ia Mor-ska-ia] Major streets of St. Petersburg.

equipages[67] of other grand, showy people, and occasionally exchanging a greeting. Gradually Collia acquired a notion of the geography of the city, and the position of the various streets, squares, and objects of interest; and the head coachman, being a kind, good-natured fellow (though, like most Russian coachmen, rather addicted to vodki-drinking at times), answered all the boy's questions, and gave much valuable information, so that very soon Collia began to feel quite at home in St. Petersburg.

One afternoon, while the Prince's sledge was being driven rapidly down the Bolshaya Morskaya, it passed another sledge with a single occupant.

Collia was standing on the footboard at the back of the Prince's sledge. As the vehicle dashed forward he glanced at the man in the other sledge; glanced—then looked again, over his shoulder.

Where had he seen the face before? Surely he had seen that face, or one marvellously like it. And all the way home the boy was trying to recall the circumstances under which he had met some one of whom this man reminded him.

At last, when he had got into his room,

[67] Horse-drawn carriages with attendants.

and was divesting[68] himself of his warm outer clothing, it flashed upon him. In imagination he was out once more amid a wide-spread waste of snow, out in the open, with the reins of three fiery horses in his hands, and the floor of the troika under his feet. He saw again a sledge dash up with its suspicious-looking occupants, and he realised, with a shudder, that the man who had leaped out as though to detain him, and who had probably been the one to fire the pistol, was the very person whose face he had just seen in the crowded street of the capital.

"I must certainly tell his Highness of this," said Collia to himself; "the man can hardly be a common highway robber, or he would not be here."

[68] Removing clothing from; freeing; ridding.

CHAPTER VII.

DANGER AND TEMPTERS.

AND thou thinkest there is no mistake, Collia? Thy belief is that this was the face?"

"I believe it was, your Highness."

"Thou mayest be right; remain here for a few moments, while I look through these notes."

Collia had taken an early opportunity of telling his master of the recognition he fancied he had made; and his story had caused the Prince to be very thoughtful, and even serious.

Presently, after a hasty glance over a number of papers which he held in his hand, he said: "Ever since I was attacked and robbed on that night, which we both have such cause to remember, Collia, I

have felt sure that those were no common robbers, but the agents of a great power which has lately been making itself felt more and more; and my own convictions have been confirmed by recent tidings received. My mission to the town of S—— had been for secret inquiry into the movements of several so-called revolutionists. I went alone, so that my rank and position might not be suspected, and thus that such information as I had pledged myself to obtain might be the more easily gained. But it would appear as if my precautions were vain, so far as disguising myself was concerned. These secret societies seem to be all ear and eye with regard to the affairs of their enemies; and it was on my return from S——, with the papers I had procured, that I was robbed; though I believe that the *papers* were the robbers' real object, and that they only took the money and watch and other things as a blind when the papers escaped their search. I saw the faces of the men so indistinctly that I should not recognise one of them; but by comparing the general appearance of the party that came up with thee, with the party which attacked me, I conclude that they are the same."

"But perhaps your Highness will have the goodness to explain to me," said the lad, "why they appeared to wish to stop *me* too. I told them who I was, and they could see that I was but a servant."

"Yes; but thy master is known to be an acquaintance and connection of mine, and a staunch[69] and loyal subject of his Imperial Majesty; and, possibly, they thought that thou couldest give them some information about me and my mission, of the object of which, in part, at least, doubtless, their spies had obtained news."

"But they fired after me as I drove off," replied Collia.

"Yes; that, too, we can understand, on the ground that it might be dangerous to let anyone escape who might have had time to notice the features or distinguishing marks of any of the party. And there was reason for a fear of this, on their part," continued Prince D——, "for, see, thou hast already recognised one of those men. And now, Collia, I daresay thou hast often wondered what my business, my work, really is?"

"Yes, your Highness, I often have."

"Well, child, as thou shouldest by right

[69] Firm; dependable.

know something of the occupations of thy master, if only because thou mayest find thyself made the instrument for carrying out his plans, I tell thee that I hold a prominent position among the organisers of the secret police, and that therefore I have numberless enemies, foremost among whom are those who do not wish to have the light let in upon their evil doings. Understandest thou, Collia?"

"It is quite plain, your Highness."

"And it is possible, my child, that, should it become known (and it must be ere long) that thou art my messenger and trusted servant, thou mayest have to encounter danger, and resist temptation, and run great risk for my sake, and that of the work I am doing. Dost thou fear?"

"Not I, your Highness; if there be no shame, neither is there any fear."

"Well said, Collia! Thou art the boy for me! Now go; and mind, not a word to a living soul—nay, not to brick walls themselves, about what I have told thee."

"Your Highness shall be obeyed," murmured Collia; and with a low bow he left the room, returned to the ante-chamber, in which he now always awaited the summons of the Prince, and through which

every visitor calling on business had to pass on his way to the Prince's cabinet.

◊ ◊ ◊ ◊ ◊

Quite a fortnight had passed since the conversation we have just recorded, when, one night, the Prince called Collia into the cabinet, and put into his hand a sealed packet.

"Take this," he said, "to the address you will find written here;" and he handed Collia a scrap of paper, on which a message was written.

"You *must* enter the house, late as it is; the dvornik[70] or Shveitsar[71] will unlock the doors if you say you come on business from Prince D——; then ask to see Count L—— himself. To him this packet is addressed; give it into his own hands, and obtain from him a receipt."

"I hear, your Highness."

"Go then, and make all speed home again."

[70] [**dvor**-nik] Doorman, porter, or janitor; from the Russian word for courtyard: dvor.

[71] [Shvay-**tsar**] From the German Schwiezer: Swiss; a formal, uniformed doorman in a large residence or mansion.

Collia, thus instructed, hid the packet in an inner pocket of his vest, and set forth. It was a glorious winter night, the moon clear and golden, the cold, bright stars studding the deep, dark heavens with glory.

Collia had about thirty-five minutes' walk before him, and he started at a quick, steady pace, thoroughly enjoying the keen, frosty air and healthful exercise, after being shut up in the house all day.

It was already twelve o'clock, and as he left the more frequented streets behind him he heard the clock in a public building at no great distance strike the hour in deep muffled tones, that seemed to thrill all the surrounding space and die away slowly and solemnly in the calm, cold atmosphere.

In these quiet streets the side-walks were nearly empty, and along the snowy road only an occasional sledge slipped by in a silent, ghostly manner, carrying passenger and izvozchik,[72] both half asleep.

Collia had traversed about half the distance, when he suddenly felt as though he were being followed.

Of late the boy's wits had been

[72] [iz-**voz**-chik] Sledge driver.

considerably sharpened by sundry[73] hints given him by his master, to say nothing of experiences of his own; and now he always kept eyes and ears open.

Looking round, he saw two men following him closely. Their faces were closely muffled in fur, and even when they came under the gas lamps it was impossible to distinguish their features.

Collia, however, kept along steadily at a good round pace, and had almost reached the house to which he had been sent, when the strangers overtook him, and came up, one on each side.

"Nikolai Feodorovitch!"[74] said the individual on his right.

Collia started. How did this man know his name? He made no reply to the courteous salutation, but walked on faster still.

Presently, the other stranger, a tall gentleman, in a great coat, with an enormous racoon collar, spoke in a deep voice, which Collia seemed to know. Somewhere or other, his memory told him, he had heard it before.

"You are young to be trusted with

[73] Various; miscellaneous.

[74] Son of Feodor.

important letters and messages, my boy; but doubtless Prince D—— has excellent reasons for his choice in a messenger!"

The deep-voiced stranger paused as though for an answer, but none came. Collia was thoroughly on his guard, and though startled enough at the knowledge these men displayed, he was not to be surprised into conversation with them.

Presently the same man spoke again, his voice modulated to a deep, low, musical murmur.

"Do not imagine we want to do you harm, child," he said gently; "nay, we admire you too much for that, and only envy the Prince his trusty messenger. Ah! What would not *I* give to have a boy like you upon whose fidelity[75] I could depend! I tell you, Collia—this is what you are usually called, is it not?—I would give you three times the wages that you get now if you would serve me, and you should go home to your father and your old master once a year beside."

Again Collia started, and peered upwards, to get a sight of the features which, from the voice, he thought he ought to know, but it was of no use. These strangers, who seemed to have an insight into

[75] Faithfulness.

everybody's private affairs, were quite hidden by the standing-up collars of their coats. Collia stared and speculated, but all to no purpose. Meanwhile, however, he kept his wonder and his speculation to himself, and remained silent.

Just then they came opposite a large restaurant, the bright lights of which shone through its plate-glass windows invitingly.

"Come in here with us, and have a glass of champagne," said the smaller man persuasively. "I daresay the Prince thinks champagne too good for his servants, but we should think nothing too good for so faithful and clever a boy as you. Come!" and he laid a detaining hand on Coffin's arm.

The boy shook it off. "I thank you, sirs," he replied, "for your offer, and I wish you good-night."

He was slipping between them, when the big man caught hold of him. "What! you won't even drink with us? Why, what a determined fellow you are! A fine lad this, is he not?" And he turned, as though in admiration of Collia, to his companion.

"A fine fellow? Yes, indeed!" And the smaller man took a hand out of his

pocket, and gave Collin a hearty slap on the back, following it up with a series of queer caressing little pats. Then he said, "Well, we shall meet again some day, perhaps, when you will treat us with a little more confidence. Good-night."

As they let go of him, Collia was off, and in another minute had reached his destination. After some trouble in rousing the dvornik and schwetzar, he was admitted and ushered into a comfortable room, warmed with an English open fireplace and coal fire—luxuries which were now not uncommon in the new houses of St. Petersburg. Here an elderly gentleman with a thoughtful face and iron-grey hair was seated at a table, writing.

Collia came forward, took from the inner pocket the packet which had been entrusted to him, and handed it to the gentleman.

Apparently it contained but a very few words, for it took almost no time to read.

"I am to carry a receipt to his Highness, if you please, your Excellency," said Collia.

"You shall. Here it is;" and the Count wrote a short sentence on a scrap of paper, twisted it into a true lover's knot,[76]

[76] A complicated knot which is not easily untied.

and handed it to Collia.

The lad took it with a bow, and, turning, was about to leave the room, when he was stopped by an exclamation of surprise from the gentleman.

"What in the name of all that is dreadful have you got on your back?" cried Count L——.

Collia stood still while the Count approached and silently examined him.

After a close inspection of Collia's coat, he led the boy to a pier-glass at one side of the room, bidding him turn and look over his shoulder at the reflection of his back.

"I certainly see something white, your Excellency," said Collia, looking up into his companion's face, with innocent wonder in his own. "What can it possibly be?"

"You may well ask 'what can it be?'" replied the Count, sternly, his penetrating eyes, under their black bushy brows, meeting Collia's open, unflinching gaze with severe question: "Child, in whose company have you been to-night? *This is a Revolutionary Placard!*"[77]

[77] Sign or public notice.

CHAPTER VIII.

A MYSTERIOUS LETTER.

A REVOLUTIONARY PLACARD! Collia was thunderstruck. He had known little of the plots and counter-plots which went on about him; knew nothing, save in the vaguest way, even of the importance of the documents and letters with which he was entrusted. In him was wonderfully developed a truly Russian characteristic, the instinct of implicit obedience.

Never inquisitive, he left to his master all responsibility, content to do his duty without questioning.

He really only knew by hearsay what a revolutionary placard was; and now to be told that one of these mysterious publications was actually clinging to him

seemed too strange and dreadful. For they were mysterious indeed; printed by some secret printing-press, undiscovered by the vigilance of the police; dispersed during the silent watches of the night by agents who seemed invisible and intangible as the air itself; found posted on the walls in conspicuous situations, in great thoroughfares where policemen had their beats and mounted Cossacks[78] patrolled incessantly. No one could tell whence[79] or how they came. No one seemed to know by what agency these terrible, menacing, yet voiceless messengers winged their silent way through the air, and spread out their forbidden scrolls for the passers-by to read.

No wonder, then, that Collia was thunderstruck. But he did not shrink from the old Count's searching gaze, and to the questions again repeated: "Child, in whose company hast thou been to-night?" he replied, firmly and frankly:

"Most unwillingly, your Excellency, I was in the company of two strangers during the first portion of my walk." And

[78] Members of an elite cavalry corps in Russia's army.

[79] From what place or origin.

Collia gave, in a few words, an account of his adventure—an account that was plain and straightforward enough to satisfy even this suspicious old gentleman.

When the boy had finished his story, the Count said: "I believe thee, my lad; but what motives the rascals can have had is a mystery to me."

Collia pondered a moment. Then he cried, "Your Excellency, I think I know. These men tried at first to win me over to their side, and when I would not listen to them, then they thought they could, perhaps, cause mischief between my master and me by making it appear as though I were treacherous, or allowed myself to be drawn into bad company, and therefore was not fit for my position of trust. Once excite his Highness's distrust, and I should probably be dismissed in disgrace, and the Prince would again have to be dependent on the other servants, and there could no longer be the secrecy and privacy that he desires."

"There is reason in that; thou art not a stupid boy, though thou mayest be simple and country born," said the Count, nodding his head approvingly. "But now thou must hurry home, child. Yet stay; as thou art still likely to be watched and

followed, and as, if thou wert to go on foot, and with that back of thine exposed, the police would most surely take thee up; here is a dark rug to throw over thy shoulders, and I will give orders to the schwetzar to go out and get thee a sledge to take thee home. Here is the money for it," and the Count pressed a rouble note into Collia's hand.

"And still another thing," he continued. "Here also is a line to tell the Prince that I am convinced of the truth of thy story, and I am sure that he will be the same."

In a few minutes the arrival of a sledge-driver was announced, and Collia, with the rug round his shoulders, left the house and jumped into the sledge that was waiting for him, but not before he espied[80] two figures, which he thought he recognised as those of his unpleasant companions, standing a few paces off, under the shadow of a great house.

"A rouble if thou drive fast," whispered Collia to the izvozchik. Thou hast a good horse that can run. See, then, that she earn for thee thy tea-money."

"She shall," replied the driver, a lad scarcely older than Collia himself. "Now, Maasha, bestir[81] thyself."

[80] Caught sight of; saw at a distance.

[81] Rouse; stir to action.

And with this injunction[82] to the tall, long-legged mare that stood like a gaunt grey spectre before the little low sledge, the driver flourished his toy of a whip, slapped the reins on his horse's back, and Maasha began to ply her lengthy limbs, slowly and stiffly at first, for she was old and had seen her best days, but swiftly, and in long, light strides, as she warmed to her work.

Collia had seen at the first glance that she could go, and now, in a few minutes, she had put a couple of versts between the Nihilist[83] spies and the Prince's messenger.

Collia reached home without any further adventures, and told his story to the Prince, handing in, at the same time, the written papers which the Count had given him. Like the Count, the Prince could not doubt the lad's recital of what had befallen[84] him, but he made Collia take off his fur coat in his presence, dampen the placard all over, and thus peel it

[82] Command.

[83] [**nahy**-uh-list / **nee**-uh-list] A Russian revolutionary group which sought to destroy all existing social and political institutions to make way for a new state of society, employing extreme measures such as terrorism and assassination.

[84] Happened to.

away without tearing it. Then the Prince took possession of it, and sent Collin off to bed. But the boy was at first too much excited to sleep, and he lay there thinking of all that had happened, of the strange changes that had come over his life since that never-to-be-forgotten night when he had started off in the troika in search of the doctor. His thoughts travelled back to his old home, to the familiar warm, cosy rooms over the stables. He could almost, in fancy,[85] smell the fragrance of the hay in the lofts that adjoined Feodor's chamber, and hear the low whinnying or playful stamp of the horses beneath.

Then the boy thought of each member of the dear Roukassoff household. His indulgent master and mistress, the sweet little ladies for whom in summer he saddled the ponies, and behind whom he used to ride over the widespread country round. And lastly, the kind, gentle English lady who had ministered both to body and soul, had given him his greatest treasure, his little Testament, and had taught him that not only in the church may the heart rise in prayer to its Creator and Saviour, but that at all times and in every place the Lord's ear is

[85] Imagination; the mind's eye.

open to hear, and His hand outstretched to help.

Deep down now in Collia's very heart of hearts was the belief that Jesus Christ who lived on earth once, and lives now in heaven, was his Friend and Brother, and was as truly with him as He was with the disciples, when He walked and talked with them in the ages gone by. He had read and re-read his little Testament—Mary Cornwall's gift—until the story of the life and deeds and words of Jesus had become very real to him. He cast himself in simple faith upon the mercy of God, as made known in Jesus Christ. He sought and found forgiveness for his sins through the death of Jesus on the cross, and he ever asked for the gift of the Comforter and Guide, promised to His disciples by the Saviour.

Collia, since his arrival in St. Petersburg, had twice received letters from his father, giving a good account of all on the Vallikin estate. Feodor wrote that Miss Mary had presented him too with a Testament, and that he and his old friend, the steward, Ivan Philipitch, were reading it together, to their great delight and profit. Mary Cornwall's work, quiet and small as it seemed, was yet causing

itself to be felt for good; and through her the truth as it is in Jesus was being made known among those whose religion hitherto had been a mere form.

Soothed and quieted by thoughts and memories so sweet to him, and which the contents of his father's last letter recalled to his mind, Collia began to feel sleepy; gradually the dark-fringed eyelids closed, the breathing became soft and regular, till soon, far away in the land of dreams, the miserable plots and placards, the work and anxieties of his present life, were forgotten, and all for this night, at least, was peace.

For the next few days nothing remarkable happened, except that a good many people called and had interviews with the Prince, and a number of telegrams were sent to various places, and letters and curious verbal messages to people in town, so that the young messenger was kept busy.

On the fifth morning, however, after the letters had been brought from the post-office, the call-bell sounded, which was the signal to Collia that he was wanted in the Prince's cabinet.

The boy found his master alone, and a letter in a bold, free hand lay open before him.

"Listen, Collia," said the Prince, abruptly, as his page entered, "listen, for here at last is something really of interest." And he read as follows, with the old sarcastic smile curling his handsome lips:

"Who are you that would oppose the will of the people by the weapons of law and government, the true names of which are tyranny and oppression? Beware! for in proportion to your supposed success is your danger. This is to warn you that if you persist in the investigations you are now pursuing, you may as well set your house in order, for you will live no longer than it takes the moon to wax and wane[86] once more. Or if consideration for your own life move you not to prudence,[87] at least spare, by your attention to this warning, the faithful child who has followed you from a quiet home, and who will sooner or later inevitably share your fate."

"Now, Collia, my boy, my companion in danger! Shall we knock under to these brow-beating villains, and stop in a work I have set on foot, and hush matters

[86] Complete the cycle between new moons – 29.5 days.

[87] Caution; discretion.

up?—or shall we go through with what we believe to be our duty, regardless of consequences, except so far as we can avert[88] them by prudence and caution? Child though thou art, I take counsel with thee, partly because this dastardly threat includes thy life—partly because thou hast so far proved thyself faithful and trusty and devoted. Say, Collia, shall we yield?"

"Yield—your Highness? Nay, not one inch! They write thus but to alarm us. They feel that they themselves are in danger, and would make your Highness withdraw the net that is gathering about them. Hence the threats. If your Highness also sees it best, and you despise not poor Collia's opinion, I would say let us go on with what seems to be duty—God can take care of His own, if it be His will. But if it be not His will to preserve your Highness's life, then the writer of that letter said well when he wrote that your Collia would share your fate."

[88] Avoid; prevent.

CHAPTER IX.

THE COLONEL'S VOICE.

A COUPLE of weeks passed. There had been no more threatening letters, and the Prince went on with his enquiries and counter-plots; and not a few arrests were made in the city of people with false passports, and whose homes appeared to be the resort of all kinds of strange characters, and the examination of whose belongings showed very little valuable property, but plenty of clever disguises, sundry bundles of compromising papers, and some forbidden fire-arms.

The Prince occupied himself as usual. Three mornings in the week he received all who wished to see him and speak to him on business. The other mornings

were given up to correspondence, which—as for the sake of secrecy he did not keep a secretary—was no light matter. In the afternoon he made calls, or merely took a drive, while his evenings were spent in society, occasionally at the theatre, and now and then at home.

Collia was busier than ever, and was looked upon with no small envy by the other servants, though the Prince made no secret of the fact that the new-comer was entitled to special consideration for having, as he said, saved his life.

In truth, master and servant had become, even in this short time, much attached to each other, and Collia could not help noticing that the Prince's face, hard and scornful[89] towards many people, was never so to him; and that the Prince's voice, often hard and peremptory[90] when speaking to his other servants, softened its tones even when his Highness was only giving the page his daily orders and instructions.

Nor was Prince D——, on his side, blind to the boy's growing devotion to his person, to his absolute obedience, and to his instinctive understanding of unexpressed wishes.

[89] Expressing disrespect, disdain, or intense dislike.
[90] Not allowing contradiction or refusal.

It touched him—hard man of the world though he was—to see the truth, the warmth, the simplicity of this child-like heart; and sometimes he had almost an irresistible longing to raise the boy right out of the station in which he had been born, to educate and treat him as an equal, if only to give excuse and outlet for the affection that was creeping into his heart and filling with warmth what he thought had been chilled to death years before.

One bright morning Collia was waiting as usual in the ante-room. On the days when the Prince received people on business, it was the boy's duty to see all visitors whom the footmen ushered into the outer room, and to announce their names to the Prince, as one by one they entered the cabinet.

This morning was one of the receiving days, and Collia was congratulating himself upon the small number of visitors who were availing themselves of their privilege, when he was startled by a loud ring at the door-bell, and by the entrance of a tall stranger, dressed in an officer's uniform. He was a strikingly handsome man, though a keen observer might have noticed a certain expression

of secretiveness in the closed mouth and unrevealing eyes.

"Your name, sir?" inquired Collia, fixing his steadfast eyes upon the face before him, and once more feeling as though somehow this countenance, too, were familiar to him.

"Say, Colonel Abootkoff," replied the officer; but Collia, for a moment, was as though he heard not. At the sound of that deep, bell-like voice, his heart stopped beating, then went on with a thump and a rush that sent the hot blood surging up and down. There could not be more than one such voice in St. Petersburg, surely; and that was the property of the big man, one of the two strangers who stopped him on his way to Count L——'s that eventful night.

Yes; and now he was sure of another thing, too. Though lacking the ornament of a beard, and decorated now only with a military moustache, this, again, was the man whom the Prince's sledge had passed in the Bolshaya Morskaya a few weeks ago.

"Well, Sir Page! Where did you learn these courtly manners?" asked the Colonel, contemptuously.[91] "Is the Prince

[91] Disrespectfully; arrogantly; rudely.

invisible, that you keep me waiting thus?"

Collia could not bring himself to utter an apology, and his only reply was to advance a step, making a sign to the stranger to take a seat in the ante-room; for the lad wished to say a word of warning to his master ere the Colonel entered the cabinet.

But, as though anticipating Collia's intention, and determined to thwart it, the officer ignored the page's sign, and followed closely on his heels, so that not a word could be exchanged between Collia and the Prince. The boy could only make a sort of warning signal with eye and hand, and he could not be sure, from the expression of his master's face, whether he had even noticed, much less understood it.

Instead of carefully closing the door behind him as he left the cabinet, Collia only made a feint[92] of turning the handle, and really left the door ajar. Then he sat down in the ante-room, feeling full of breathless anxiety, and longing to be at his master's side.

He heard the deep voice of the stranger

[92] A movement made in order to deceive an opponent.

say, after a moment's pause, "I have a petition to present, to which I beg your Highness's kind and careful attention."

The Prince made some polite rejoinder,[93] and Collia heard the rustling of paper, and then the Prince's voice once again in low, murmuring tones, as he read half to himself, half-aloud, the document that had been presented to him.

This had scarcely continued a minute, when Collia heard a short metallic click, followed instantaneously by a loud report.[94]

With a cry of horror he rushed into the cabinet, and as the smoke cleared away he saw his master and the stranger engaged in a fierce struggle. A discharged pistol lay on the floor, but the officer held a dagger, which he was trying to point at his antagonist's[95] breast, while the Prince, divining the murderous intention, was concentrating all his strength in the endeavour to keep the wicked right hand from nearer approach. In one instant Collia saw the position of affairs. Dashing in between the combatants, he made a swift upward stroke with his

[93] Reply; response.

[94] Sharp explosive sound; the sound of a gun firing.

[95] Belonging to an opponent or adversary.

strong young arm, and the dagger flew out of the assassin's hand. Then crouching to the floor he seized the ankles of the stranger, and with a tremendous effort—aided by the Prince, who forced his enemy backward at the same moment—he succeeded in throwing him down.

By this time the room was full of the Prince's retainers, and ere many minutes were over, the so-called Colonel was led off between policemen, looking very different from the proud officer who had come in only a few minutes before. As he passed Collia, he glanced at him and hissed between his half-closed lips:

"Child, thou hast come across my path; my want of success and my capture are due to thee. Headstrong and ill-fated that thou art, know that the society to which I belong have bound themselves to avenge every wrong. The forfeit of thy life will be the price of my lost freedom. Thou mayest hide thyself, and protect thyself as thou best canst, but the avenger's hand will find thee out."

Collia was too much excited at the time to take special notice of the assassin's words, but afterwards the mysterious threat recurred to his memory with a terrible significance. He had now had

some experience of the strange and sinister working of the secret societies. Apparently they had means of access to every kind of information, and this gave them a formidable power over individuals whose secrets they knew, and through whom they managed indirectly, but not the less surely, to influence others.

For aught[96] that the Prince or Collia knew, there might be a dozen spies of the Revolutionist party among his Highness's own servants, and thus everything that went on in the house might be known outside.

Not a day had passed lately without bringing tales—some true, some false, some exaggerated, but all showing the relentless hate and revengeful feeling of the enemy.

On one occasion a dvornik, who had been the means of discovering a Nihilist rendezvous[97] and printing-press for treasonable publications, and had received a reward for giving information to the police, was found dead in his bed a few days later.

No one had seen the assassin, no one had heard him; the black night had been

[96] Anything; whatever.

[97] Meeting; meeting place.

his covering; his arm had been swift, his stroke sure, and even in the darkness he had not mistaken his man. And on the bed had been left a paper only bearing these words, in blood-red characters, *In Remembrance.*

"Is such to be my fate?" thought Collia that night as he lay down to sleep. And then he sighed as he recollected the old peaceful country life left behind, as it seemed to him, for ever; and he wondered how his father would feel if anything were to happen to his son, so far away.

And then he recalled to mind, with love and gratitude, what the Prince had said to him to-day, after the would-be assassin had been removed. How he had called him back into the cabinet, shut the door upon the rest of the excited servants, taken him by the hand like an equal, and spoken in a voice tender and trembling with emotion:

"Colliushka,[98] this is the third time thou hast saved my life. Now ask a boon,[99] for I would lessen somewhat of the debt I owe thee, if I may."

And Collia had answered: "I ask no boon, my dear and precious master, save

[98] A nickname for Nikolai.

[99] Blessing; favour; request; benefit.

to continue in your Highness's service, and to merit your Highness's trust, and—if I may not be too bold—affection."

And then the boy remembered, with a thrill, that the Prince's eyes—those keen, glittering eyes—had suddenly softened and filled with tears, while he bent his head and kissed him—yes, *him*—poor Collia, the peasant lad, on both cheeks, saying, "My child, I love thee and trust thee as if thou wert my own. Nor, though thou art so modest in thy wishes and petitions, shall thy future be forgotten by me, if God spare us both."

"If God spare us both!" repeated Collia to himself. "If!" Yes, for indeed both were in danger, which neither could foresee nor avert.

And then the words turned themselves into a prayer, and Collia said aloud, "O merciful God, spare us both, if it be Thy will, for Thy Son's sake." And so, with a feeling that his prayer would be answered, he lay down again, and dropped asleep as calmly and as soundly as ever he had done in his cosy quiet room over the stable.

Sleep on, true, loving-hearted child, sleep quietly while you may; for though God, the All-wise, hear your prayer, and

grant you your life to have and hold for Him, a trial may yet be in store for you, and a struggle for victory with the last foe himself.

But now, Collia—now, for a little while sleep on, and take your rest.

CHAPTER X.

WELCOME TIDINGS.

COLLIA said not a word to his master of the threat uttered by the stranger.

"He will only fear to send me about as he has hitherto done," thought he, "and I shall become useless to him, or he will always be feeling anxious about me when I am out, and will have this added to his other burdens. No; better keep it to myself, and do my work as usual."

But still the boy could not shake off the depression that hung over him. Indeed, he must have been almost more than human, much less a simple peasant lad, to have been wholly indifferent to the terrible words that had been said to him. It spoke well for Collia's unselfish

love for the Prince, and for his genuine faith in God's protecting power, that the depression upon his spirits never influenced him in a way that induced him to shirk[100] from exposure to danger in his long lonely walks at night. Manfully he strove against the dread that threatened sometimes to overmaster him, body and soul. Had the danger met him face to face, he would not have shrunk from it, for Collia was no coward. But the idea of an invisible, intangible agency, whose messenger, sure and swift, was to issue, ghost-like, from the dark, inflict the death-wound, and disappear, was a terrible one indeed!

It would have been terrible enough, even to an old man satiated with the world's enjoyments, bitter with its disappointments, laden with the fruits of its sins, and weary of life itself. How much more so was it then to a youth in whom feeling, and hope, and capacity for enjoyment, and love and work were in full force, and who had that clinging to life which is one proof of vitality and freshness?

Bravely and persistently Collia wrestled with the ghastly fear that chilled

[100] Avoid, evade, or neglect one's work or duty.

his heart; and at last there came to him—in answer to his prayer for courage and help—a growing, deepening calm, a steadfastness which was not indifference to what might be before him, but a quiet acquiescence[101] in the Divine will, whatever that will might prove to be, and a giving up of himself into wiser hands than those of any human protector.

It was no small comfort to the poor boy to receive about this time from his old fellow-servant, the facetious Yakof, a letter which, detailed in Yakof's own comical fashion all the news and gossip of the Vallikin estate, and ended up by saying that "Mees Mye" had just heard of the serious illness of a friend in St. Petersburg, and that as the sufferer had none of her own people near her to minister to her wants or take care of her, the young governess had asked Anna Petrovna for leave of absence for a few weeks, in order that she might go to St. Petersburg and nurse her friend through this illness.

"Of course our mistress has given her leave," added Yakof, "and she is going at once. Happily she will not be so helpless now as during her former journey, for

[101] Acceptance without protest; silent agreement.

she knows something of our language, and can make herself understood."

"Mees Mye coming here!" cried Collia, delightedly. "Coming to St. Petersburg! Then I shall surely see her!" And the thought of meeting his kind English friend made him forgetful, for the time, even of the horrible threat that hung over him like a dark storm-cloud, carrying lightning shafts and sudden death.

"Mees Mye is coming to St. Petersburg, may it please your Highness," said Collia to his master that night. There was a different feeling now between the Prince and his page, and Collia was encouraged to open his heart freely at all times, and was never laughed at or snubbed.

The Prince looked up from a book he was reading. "Mees Mye. Who is she? Ah, yes, I remember; she was that pretty English governess whom I saw at Dimitri Romanovitch's house." And he smiled a smile which was radiantly reflected in Collia's face.

"Dost thou know where she is going to stay?" inquired the Prince.

"No, not yet; but Yakof says she will send me her address through your Highness, if permitted."

"Of course I permit," replied Prince

D——, laughing. "Thou hast looked overgrave and thoughtful of late, Collia, and I am glad that anything pleasant should occur to bring back their former roguish[102] brightness to those child-eyes of thine. I fear, me, Collia, that this work and responsibility, and fear of plots against me, are hurting thee, and stealing away the joy and light of thy young life; and I would not have it so."

"Your Highness must not be troubled about me," replied Collia, suddenly recollecting that there was a fresh cause for disquietude,[103] of which his master knew nothing, "and I will try, in my turn, not to be too anxious about my dear master. Night and morning I read in my little Testament about Him who said that the very hairs of our head are all numbered, and that even a sparrow falls not to the earth without His knowledge. And then I pray Him to have your Highness in His keeping, and save you from the designs of wicked men."

"Thou lovest thy little Testament, child?"

"I love it—yes, your Highness. First I cared for it because the English lady

[102] Playful; bold.

[103] Anxiety; worry.

gave it me, and, later, for its own sake, because it taught me and brought me to love and trust the Saviour."

"Well, Collia, I am content if it give thee pleasure. It seems to me we all need as much comfort as we can get nowadays; and I am almost tempted, sometimes, to follow thy example, and see what reading the Testament will do for me."

The Prince spoke lightly, but there was a ring of pathos[104] in his voice and a sadness in his face that emboldened Collia to say, "If your Highness only would!"

"There, child! Look not up in my face with those beseeching[105] eyes of thine, or I may be tempted to make rash promises, which my more worldly judgment might condemn. Run away, Collia, and forget not to pray for thy master this night."

◊ ◊ ◊ ◊ ◊

The next evening the Prince gave his page orders to come to him at the theatre, where he was going to see the performance of the Russian opera, *A Life for the Tsar*.[106]

[104] Emotion; pity; sorrow; sympathy.

[105] Begging; appealing; urgently requesting.

[106] Mikhail Glinka's (1804-1857) opera was originally titled *Ivan Susanin* (1836), but is also known as *A Life for the Tsar*.

"Thou must come to my box," he said, "and I will entrust thee with a letter which thou must take to the Vasilievsky Ostrov[107] to Chiconshy. I would leave the letter with thee now, but, before sending it, I must consult with two gentlemen whom I expect to meet at the theatre. Thou wilt, therefore, come to me about ten o'clock, Collia, and then start at once with the packet. And it will be best for thee to drive there, child, for it is a long, lonely way to Chiconshy, the lower part of the Ostroff, where I want thee to go."

"I hear, your Highness."

[107] [Va-**sil**-ev-ski **Os**-trov] Basil's Island, a section of the city of St. Petersburg.

CHAPTER XI.

THE BLOW FALLS.

IN good time that night Collia started for the theatre called the Marinsky, and reached it about ten o'clock, in accordance with the Prince's orders. He easily found his master's box, received the letter, and came out again into the street. He was about to hail a passing sledge, when it occurred to him to feel in his pocket for his purse. To his vexation it was not there, and now he remembered that he had taken it out for some purpose, and had left it on the table in his room. There was nothing for it but to walk to Chiconshy, or go home first for his purse; and the latter he did not feel quite justified in doing, as he had been told to go straight to Chiconshy from the theatre.

"Well, I must make up my mind to a long walk," said Collia to himself, wrapping his fur coat more closely about him to keep out the cold wind. And then he set off at a rapid pace towards the quay,[108] intending to cross the river on the ice, and thus avoid a long round, and get to his destination more quickly.

As he hurried along he tried hard to keep his thoughts from dwelling upon the painful subject that had occupied them so much of late. But, in spite of his efforts, he found himself continually looking round to see if he were not being followed, though in these busy streets there were always numbers of people about until very late at night, and he might easily have been followed by half-a-dozen spies without being at all aware of their presence.

He reached the quay at length, and walked along for some distance, then went boldly down into the river, where the ice road lay white and shining, covered with firm pure snow. And again he turned uneasily, to see that no one was behind him. This part of the river was but little frequented at night, and had he seen one

[108] Wharf, built parallel to the shoreline, where ships dock.

person only beside himself Collia would have felt justified in retracing his steps, and going by the bridge instead of across the ice upon the Neva.[109] But he saw no one; so summoning up all his courage, he commenced his journey at a quick trot, which promised soon to get him to the other side.

He was at about the middle of the river when, on turning to look once more, he saw a sledge drawn by a single horse advancing at a good pace. Collia drew a long breath of relief. He was thankful to see a sledge rather than a foot passenger, and he slackened his pace somewhat, hoping it might be some izvozchik going home, who would perhaps give him a lift.

As the sledge came up, however, he saw that the single occupant was no izvozchik, but a gentlemanly-looking man, driving himself, and sitting in the passenger's seat, not the coachman's seat.

"Where may you be going, brother?" asked the man in the sledge.

"To the other side," replied Collia.

"Yes; that much I can see for myself," said the man with a disagreeable laugh. "Would you like to drive with me just across the ice?"

[109] [**nee**-v*uh* / nye-**vah**] River which flows through St. Petersburg to the Gulf of Finland.

"No, thank you," answered Collia, in whose mind distrust of the stranger had sprung up as soon as he saw that he was not an izvozchik.

"Well, it is all the same to me," remarked the man; "but as I do not wish to forego the pleasure of your company and conversation, I will walk for a while by your side, since you will not drive by mine."

A PARTING SHOT.

Collia did not reply. He was wondering what he had better do. To run away was useless. He would be overtaken at once. For not a doubt remained in his mind that this, at last, was the dread messenger of the secret society, sent on his deadly errand. Probably the

fellow had watched him from the theatre, and had followed him to this place, which was the loneliest and most desolate of all the way.

These thoughts rushed through Collia's mind while the man stepped leisurely out of the sledge. As he did so, the great coat he wore flew open with the wind; and though the stranger closed it again with hasty hand, Collia had seen, in that instant, the gleam of something bright and sharp tucked into the belt round his waist. The man then turned for a minute, keeping, however, his left shoulder turned towards Collia, while he stooped to take something from the inside of the sledge. In that minute a thought struck the lad. With a sudden and vigorous bound he dashed forward, coming violently into collision with the stooping figure, and striking it with such force that he threw the man down upon the slippery snow.

One more step, and he was in the sledge, the reins in his hands. The old instincts that belonged to his early calling seemed to come back to him, as he gave the horse its head, and shouted, to urge it to a gallop. The lad's heart beat wildly with hope and triumph as the

noble animal bounded over the snow in obedience to his voice and hand; but ere Collia had put fifty feet between his supposed enemy and himself, he heard a noise, and felt a sharp, burning pain in his left shoulder, followed by a warm gush of blood. The poor boy turned faint and sick.

"He has shot me! I am going to die!" he said to himself. "Yet, no, I must not faint here, or he will get me and put me into one of those holes under the ice, and no one will ever know what has become of me." And then his whole heart went up in an agonised cry, that God would give him strength to escape from the hands of his enemy.

Manfully Collia struggled against the dizziness and pain, while still, with hand and voice, he urged the horse to a more rapid pace. A few minutes, and the river was crossed. The horse dragged the sledge up the *spusk,*[110] and there, right in front of a policeman's watch-hut,[111] the reins dropped from Collia's hands, and he fell forward, senseless, with his head on the driver's seat.

[110] [spoosk] A gradual incline made of boards, connecting the shore with the ice on the river.

[111] A small, temporary shelter.

CHAPTER XII.

IN THE MARINSKY.

"HOW came they to bring him here, all this way, when he was found on the Wassili Ostroff?"

"They took him to the Mary Magdalene Hospital in the first instance, but there was not a vacant bed in the surgical wards, and the others were so full of typhus and diphtheria that no patients could be admitted suffering from wounds, for fear of bad consequences from the poisoned air."

"What did you find on that lad's person?"

"Nothing much; only a letter directed to someone at Chiconshy, and a little Testament with a short sentence, that I could not read, written in the fly-leaf.

Yes, and a pocket-hand-kerchief marked Collia."

"No money?"

"None at all, not even a purse; but stitched inside the lining of his cap was the name and address of that Prince D——, the attempt on whose life we read in the papers lately. You know he is high in the police force, and I think there is no doubt that this lad is a messenger or servant of his."

"Then it might be well to let the Prince know?"

"Most surely! Indeed, we might get into serious trouble if we did not."

The foregoing conversation took place between the doctor's attendant and the sister of charity.

They had met in a corridor near one of the surgical wards of the great Marinsky Hospital, and were comparing notes with reference to the new patient just brought in.

Our young hero had been carried there in the very sledge that had brought him across the river, and the house surgeon at once attended to his wound, which was pronounced a serious one in itself, and made more so by the length of time that had elapsed before it could be dressed

and the ball extracted.

Collia was so much exhausted with pain and loss of blood that when the wound was bound up, and the attendant had administered a restorative, he sank into a sort of stupor, which bade fair to last till morning.

"You have sent that letter that the boy was carrying, and also a note of the name and address in his hat, to our chief of the hospital?" asked the attendant of the sister, as he left Collia's room for the night.

"That is understood. Who would dare to keep such things? Our orders are strict."

"The question is whether we ought not to have carried the lad to the Lechebnitsa,[112] into one of the private rooms in the new building," said the attendant. "If he is the servant of so grand a nobleman, Prince D——will hardly like him to be here, among the common muzhikz."[113]

"Well, it will be time enough to move him to the private rooms when we get orders to do so," replied the sister, and

[112] [le-**cheb**-ni-tsa] In a broad sense, a place where one goes to heal; a clinic, a hospital, or a recovery ward each have their own specific term, but in a way, all are lechebnitsy.

[113] [moo-**zhiks**] Russian peasants.

here the conversation ended.

Early the next morning a telegram was sent to Prince D—— briefly stating Collia's accident and telling where he was lying; and in immediate reply to this came a special messenger from the Prince with a letter from his Highness enclosing money, and asking for the removal of the boy to a private room in the building where the dispensary[114] was situated.

So, before half-past nine in the morning, Collia found himself transferred to a good-sized room with a large window, a delightful spring mattress bed, and every comfort.

About ten o'clock the door opened, and the visiting surgeon entered, accompanied by his attendant.

He was not the surgeon who had dressed Collia's wound on the previous night, but the operating and visiting surgeon and physician, who every morning attended to look after and prescribe for patients in the rooms opening out of the long corridor on this floor.

Collia unclosed his languid[115] eyes, and fixed them on the doctor's face, and, as

[114] A clinic where medicine and medical supplies are given out.

[115] Weak; lacking energy.

he did so, a pleased smile hovered round his pale lips.

No one could look at Dr. Pavyl Karlovitch Kontarinsky without liking and trusting him. He was a small man, but well and symmetrically made, with low broad brow, full of thought and intellect, and finely shaped head, covered with a mass of glossy brown hair. His kindly grey eyes, a little heavy-lidded with late hours of study and short hours of sleep, were clear and calm, and yet responsive; he had a firm full mouth, a good chin, and a beard showing a few grey hairs.

Scrupulously fresh and clean in his person and dress—courteous and cheerful in his manner, inspiring the patient first with confidence and afterwards with affection—such (for this is a portrait, and no fancy picture) was and is Dr. Kontarinsky.

The doctor's comprehensive glance took in Collia's face in a moment. It interested him as a study in physiognomy,[116] setting aside the fact of the boy's becoming a patient of his own, and there interesting from a medical point of view. And now, as he stood at the bedside, and the attendant

[116] [fiz-ee-**og**-n*uh*-mee, fiz-ee-**on**-*uh*-mee] The art of judging character from facial features.

undid the dressing of the wound, the doctor wondered at the innocence and grave simplicity of the lad's face, and looked down with an unconscious pathos of their own.

"How did you get this wound in your shoulder?" asked Dr. Kontarinsky.

"I was shot," replied Collia.

"Yes, so I suppose; but how came a lad like you to be shot? Where were you and what were you doing?"

A faint flush dyed on Collia's cheek.

"I was doing nothing wrong," he said, sensitively fancying that the surgeon's words implied a reproach. "I was—" and here he paused, then added with deepening colour, "but I must not tell the story to anyone but my master; at least, he must be the first to hear it. Afterwards, what he permits I will tell you, *Gospodin doctor,*[117] for indeed I should so like to tell you the whole truth. But please do not think I have been wicked, or that my hurt has come through any evil that I have done."

"I will believe in nothing that you do not wish, my boy," replied Dr. Kontarinsky, "but will wait patiently for an explanation.

[117] [Go-spo-**din dok**-tor] Mr. Doctor.

And, indeed, I respect your faithfulness and prudence; and, were I your master, I should feel the utmost confidence in my servant; so you can tell him that with my compliments."

"No need, Collia, *moi drug*![118] Thy master has heard for himself," said a voice behind the doctor's back.

The doctor turned, startled for a moment, but not out of his composure. He only bowed with a calm smile; but Collia grasped the Prince's hand that was held out to him, and carried it to his lips, while a light came into his face which made the doctor feel as if the world in general must have more good in it than he had given it credit for hitherto.

"I am Prince D——," said his Highness, introducing himself, "and as this page of mine got into trouble in my service last night, I am come thus early to look him up, and hear how he got his wound. Will it be safe for him to speak that much, Doctor—Doctor——?"

"My name is Kontarinsky," said the surgeon, shaking back an obstinate lock of hair that persisted in falling over his brow as he stooped beside his patient. "Yes, your Highness, it would do the boy

[118] [moi droog] My friend.

more harm than good to be silent in your presence before he has fully unburdened his heart. I have just finished what I have to do here, so may say good-bye." And, with another bow to the Prince, and a friendly nod and smile to Collia, Dr. Kontarinsky went away, followed by the attendant, who shut the door after him.

Then Collia began at the beginning, and told the whole story, including the threat of the man who had tried to assassinate the Prince, and then the previous night's adventure, which seemed to prove beyond a doubt that the threat was no empty boast.

The Prince listened to all very patiently, though Collia was often obliged to pause in his weakness and pain.

Then when the boy had finished, his master said, "Well, Collia, thy story convinces me that I must have no more of this sort of thing. The terrible anxieties and responsibilities of these last weeks, if continued, would kill us both, if the assassins failed to put an end to us. When you get well and come home, I shall perhaps have new plans for your future. At present they are not developed, and I will say nothing about them. But be sure of this, Collia, I will never forget, in my

planning for thy future, what thou hast done and suffered for my sake."

A few days later, as Collia was dozing one afternoon, he dreamed that Mary Cornwall stood at his bedside and spoke to him.

The dream was so vivid and real that when he waked, as he did quite suddenly, he almost expected to see the fair English face bending over him.

But though his eyes were not gladdened by what would have been so welcome a sight, his quick ears caught a sound of voices in the corridor a few doors off, and one of these voices seemed to him to have the tones which he had always thought so strangely clear and beautiful.

More and more distinctly audible became the voices. Certainly the speakers were approaching. Collia heard one of the nurses say, "Ah, yes, Sudarina,[119] you wish to know in which number the Barynia with inflammation of the lungs is lying. That is number 28. She is very ill, poor thing, and we fear she cannot recover. We heard that she was only brought here because the family in which

[119] [Su-**da**-ry-nia] Ma'am; the short form of Gosu**dar**ynia; the form of address when speaking with royalty, but also in everyday high society.

she was governess was afraid she would die in their house."

And then the voice that Collia knew and loved said in correct, though hesitating Russian, "Will you take me to number 28? I am the lady's friend, and an Englishwoman like herself."

As they passed his door, Collia could not restrain a faint little cry, "Mees Mye! Mees Mye! Here is Collia!" But his trembling accents did not reach either the nurse or the governess, and as they went on to number 28 the tears filled Collia's eyes, for he was too weak to bear manfully such a disappointment as this. Presently, however, the nurse who was his especial attendant came in to see how he was progressing, and he said to her, "Dooniasha,[120] be so good as to tell that lady, when she comes out of number 28, that in number 23 is lying a boy called Collia, who would like to see her."

The nurse looked surprised, but she had no right to refuse Collia's request; and, indeed, the Prince had given such strict orders that he should be humoured in every possible way, and had followed up his injunctions by such substantial gifts that Dooniasha, apart from her willingness

[120] [Du-**nia**-sha] A nickname for Daria.

to oblige so good and amiable a patient, must have granted his petition.

"Certainly. I will not forget," she replied.

And sure enough, as the young English governess was leaving the sick room of her friend, the nurse delivered the message, and in another moment Mary Cornwall and Collia had met once more.

CHAPTER XIII.

ON THE WING.

OVER the next few weeks we can only briefly glance, for we must get to the conclusion of our story.

While her friend lingered, Mary visited the hospital every day, and always contrived to give Collia a call in passing.

After a protracted[121] struggle with the terrible disease, however, the poor lady sank at last, and there was nothing for Mary to do but to return to the country.

Still, during her brief interaction with Collia, she had helped and taught him a great deal; and she, on her side, was surprised to find, in conversation with him, how much he had learnt, both from

[121] Long in duration; drawn out; extended; prolonged.

his little Testament—which always lay on the bed beside him here at the hospital—and also from the trials and varied experiences through which he had passed since leaving his home on the Vallikin estate. And she could not but acknowledge with a thankful heart that our Heavenly Father has His own plan of teaching His children, and guiding them in the right way, and that the simplest and most child-like souls are ever those who are the most truly taught of God.

Collia was rapidly advancing towards convalescence, after three weeks of real suffering and considerable danger, when Mary left St. Petersburg on her return to the house of Dimitri Romanovitch. Previous to starting, however, she had seen Prince D——, and had talked with him about Collia, receiving from him a promise that whatever he might arrange as to the future of the lad, Collia should be allowed to go home on a visit first. She took with her countless messages of love from the boy, and sundry pretty little trifles, as tokens of remembrance to all his old friends.

Thus the English governess and the Prince's Russian page parted, with the hope of very shortly meeting again.

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"Collia," said the Prince one afternoon, as he sat by the lad's easy chair, on the occasion of one of his frequent visits to the hospital, "Collia, I have something to say to thee."

"Let your Highness speak; I am listening," replied the boy.

"Well, Collia, the good doctor that comes to thee—what call they him?"

"Dr. Kontarinsky, your Highness."

"Yes, well, Dr. Kontarinsky called on me yesterday."

Collia looked surprised.

"He called by my orders, child, of course," added Prince D——. "I wished to speak with him quietly about thee, and also to consult him about myself."

"Yourself? Is your Highness ill?"

"No, not exactly, but I have felt strangely sometimes of late, and feared there might be something wrong with my heart. I knew that my own physician would never tell me the truth, and as I saw truth as well as skill written in this Dr. Kontarinsky's face, I left word the day before yesterday for him to call on me; and yesterday he came. And he says, Collia, that hard work and great

anxieties have made a weakness which only time and perfect rest and freedom from care can cure. And he advises me to have complete change of air and scene, so I think I shall resign my appointment and go abroad. But what ails thee, Collia? What mean those tears? Child, art thou in pain?"

"Going abroad, your Highness! Going away! What will poor Collia do without his dear master? Oh, forgive me if I offend by weeping, but your Highness breaks my heart!" And the boy sobbed passionately, covering his streaming eyes with his hands.

"And is it possible, thou foolish child, that thou canst think thy master is more willing to leave thee behind than thou art to remain? Shame on thee, Collia! Thou shouldest have known me better! Nay, if I go, thou goest with me. Naught but thy wish and will, or the death of one of us, shall ever part us twain."[122]

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In two weeks more, Collia was well enough to bear the journey home; and there were great rejoicings on the Vallikin estate when he arrived there.

[122] *Archaic:* Two.

The meeting with his beloved father, with his former master and mistress, with the young ladies, with Mary Cornwall, and with his old fellow-servants was very delightful; but Collia found himself at times longing to get back to the Prince, and fearing lest some evil should befall his dear master during his absence.

A fortnight at home was all that Collia could spare, for the Prince was only waiting for his page's return to St. Petersburg to start for Italy, France, and England, on a tour of indefinite duration.

So again the farewells were said, and Collia set forth once more for the capital with mingled feelings of pain and pleasure, and after an uneventful journey found himself again with the master whom even this brief absence had made dearer to him—if that could be—than before.

Two days after Collia's return, the Prince, attended only by a courier,[123] a valet,[124] and his faithful page, left the city; and with their departure to new scenes and a different life our story comes to an end.

But let us just say in closing—lest

[123] Messenger.

[124] Personal attendant.

anyone should condemn this narrative as sensational—that the principal incidents recorded in these chapters are either facts, or founded upon facts, and that we have honestly tried to give as truthfully as possible, and without exaggeration, a few pictures—among many that might be sketched—showing some aspects of the state of things in St. Petersburg during the past year or two.

For the rest, if our readers can say, on closing these pages, that they have felt the least interested in the recital of Collia's adventures, or any profit from the little insight we may have been able to give into Russian life and character—if their faith in the power of God's holy Gospel, and in the life-giving influence of true religion, has been strengthened even a *little* by the perusal[125] of our narrative, we shall feel that even so modest and unpretending a tale as this of *The Courage of Nikolai* has not been written quite in vain.

[125] Careful reading with the intent of remembering.

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If you enjoyed *The Courage of Nikolai,* you will treasure these other Lamplighter featured selections.

The Boy Who Never Lost A Chance A. Lyster - 1850
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Three boys in the White Knights Club take on the challenge in their day-to-day lives, just like the knights of King Arthur's court, to prove their faith by their works—protecting "damsels in distress," defending the weak, and honoring their God and King. This story challenges boys to live chivalrously in their homes, neighborhoods, and communities.

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The battle continues to rage, day by day and moment by moment. But must we meet the enemy blindfolded? In order to subdue, we must see the real foe; in order to conquer, we must face the true enemy. Through this allegorical tale, we will be better equipped to recognize, then to effectively slay, the many Giants who confront us. We will break through the web of Sloth, struggle out of the pit of Selfishness, choke up the fount of Anger, flee the secret lurking-place of Untruth, and triumph over our most malicious enemy—Pride. *The Giant Killer* is the tool to reach for if you or your loved ones need encouragement or confidence to enter into the battlefield once again. If you feel that you have nothing firm upon which to lay hold, this book will help you to grasp the strong cord of Love as your means of safety and deliverance.

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The Stranger At Home Various Authors – 1775-1849
The Stranger at Home, along with its accompanying stories, might seem a little "hard-edged," but it aptly challenges us to reconsider our God-given roles as parents and children. The folly of permissive parenting, and the inevitable consequences of obstinacy, disobedience, lying and vanity are brought forth with "not-so-subtle" clarity, yet permeated with life-changing truths.

Stick to the Raft Mrs. George Gladstone - 1877
Fifteen-year-old Hans Richter travels far from home to find work in the locks of a river. His father had taught him that there is a Raft that will support him in the deepest waters and amid the fiercest storms. When Hans becomes the target among jealous peers, he learns that it is not always easy to "stick to the Raft." Mischief turns to maliciousness, and Hans is the recipient of a serious injury. Will he stick to his plans for vengeance, or will he "stick to the Raft?"

Me and Nobbles Amy LeFeuvre - 1908
Amy LeFeuvre has done it again! An enchanting story about imaginative Master Bobby and his beloved "friend," Nobbles. With great expectation, Bobby daily awaits his absent father's return, knowing he hasn't been forgotten. In the meantime, Bobby finds the secret to obtaining his very own clean white robe so that he can enter the golden gates that lead to the splendid golden city.

Little Sir Galahad Lillian Holmes - 1904
This story will capture your heart as you peer into the life of a little boy who struggles to walk. Facing new restrictions and challenges, David learns that real strength comes in controlling his own spirit. He seeks to follow the "real" Sir Galahad who said, "My strength is as the strength of ten, because my heart is pure."

A Puzzling Pair Amy LeFeuvre - 1898
Guy and Berry, inseparable twins, are bursting with creativity and spunk. They are on a mission—to fill Guy's very big picture of the second coming of Jesus with all the people who are ready to meet Him! But his picture must be true, and time is running out! This rather unique approach to evangelism is as pure, bold, and simple as it gets!

Buried in the Snow Franz Hoffman - 1879
Full of twists, turns and unexpected dangers, this book will cause you to see life from a different perspective. You will be blessed by the gentle wisdom of an old grandfather and the unconditional love of his grandson as they come face to face with one of the most difficult decisions of their lives. From the depths of despair to the pinnacle of blessing, this dramatic encounter will surely elicit a full spectrum of emotional responses.

Shipwrecked, But Not Lost Hon. Mrs. Dundas
Impulsive, impatient young boys find themselves reaping the dreadful consequences of following foolish counsel. Stranded in the Arctic for the long winter, the two unfortunate lads learn to trust our merciful God as they try to survive against all odds, fighting bears, wolves and frigid temperatures.

Tom Watkins' Mistake Emma Leslie **- 1885**
Tom Watkins' Mistake realistically illustrates common temptations encountered by young people today. In a day of situation ethics, this relevant story speaks volumes. A brother and sister, enticed by material gain, forfeit their good reputation. We need to guard against dishonesty and deception!

The Bird's Nest Christoph von Schmid – 1768-1854
Strength of character lies in the determination to hold on to truth regardless of circumstances or consequences. The hero in this story proves that every seemingly insignificant deed is noticed by God. Even though his life is threatened by the prince and his guards, this young man's word is a treasure that will not be sacrificed; it will be rewarded in a most unusual turn of events.

Clean Your Boots, Sir? Anonymous
This is a captivating story about a hard-working shoeshine boy who is willing to clean the filthy old boots of a farmer, knowing that he doesn't pay very well. Later, a small act of honesty, when he thinks no one is looking, causes him to become successful for the rest of his life.

Tom Gillies Mrs. George Gladstone - 1873
Tom Gillies and Dick Potter secretly meet at their favorite cave to concoct their plans for the day and plot the mischievous schemes which have given them so bad a name on Norton Island. The townspeople complain that the island is too small to hold such troublesome boys. Tom is sent away to work, where he learns that his bad habits have fastened strong chains around him, and sin has tied binding knots, making him a prisoner. He discovers the One who can untie those dreadful knots and free him to live a productive life among the people of Norton Island.

Fire in the Sky (formerly *The Stolen Child*)
Christoph von Schmid - 1840
An incredible story and "new favorite!" Little Henry is taken hostage by a band of robbers and lives for years in a deep, dark cave. When he stumbles upon a crevice in the wall, he escapes to the land above and experiences with wonder the brilliance of the sun and the magnificence of the vast blue sky. Through the friendship of a shepherd, he learns about the miracle of a tiny seed and the expression of love it represents. This creative work will give you a fresh appreciation for the natural wonders of creation that we so often take for granted.

Boys of Grit Who Changed the World
Archer Wallace - 1927
In this second volume of *Boys of Grit*, you will find inspiring stories such as that of an ordinary blacksmith who mastered twenty languages because he valued every spare moment. The life stories of these men will give boys and girls hope, courage, and motivation to become all that God wants them to be. Enjoy true accounts of American inventors Samuel Morse and Robert Fulton, Danish author Hans Christian Andersen, Canada's greatest merchant Timothy Eaton, Scottish author Sir Walter Scott, American vocalist Roland Hayes, Austrian composer Franz Joseph Haydn, English philanthropist and soap maker William H. Lever, English hymn-writer Isaac Watts and more.

Probable Sons Amy LeFeuvre - 1895
Probable Sons etches into our hearts the importance of forgiveness and reconciliation. This delightful story will keep you smiling as our little heroine, Milly, boldly and innocently exhorts "probable sons" to return home. (She can't pronounce "prodigal.") May the truths found in this little story find a resting place in the many hearts that have strayed far from home.

The Golden Thread Norman MacLeod - 1867
There was once a kingdom near the treacherous Hemlock Forest where an evil king and his followers dwelt. Only those who held on to the Golden Thread could wander past the boundaries of the kingdom and return safely. It is a fearful thing to lose one's way, and Prince Phillip must learn the lessons of the Golden Thread if he is ever to return.

Always in His Keeping Anonymous - 1786
Based on a true story during the time of John Wesley, a brother and sister, stolen as infants, struggle to find their true identities and the faith to rest in a God who sometimes allows the righteous to suffer. This dramatic story is reminiscent of the life of Joseph understanding that His ways are not our ways!

The Three Weavers Annie Fellows Johnston - 1897
This is a special allegory for fathers to read to their daughters. As the story goes, once upon a time there were three weavers, and to each was born a daughter. The 'watcher of weavers' prophesied, "A royal prince shall seek to wed thy child," but she must weave a mantle for the prince that will be fair to look upon with rich cloth of gold, and it must fit him as perfectly as the falcon's feathers fit the falcon. Each father is responsible to teach his daughter how to prepare for her prince. When should he begin? The father's approach, coupled with his daughter's cooperation, will decide the fate of her future.

The Lost Ruby
Christoph von Schmid - 1841
This is the story of young Lieutenant Wildberg and the heavy price he paid for succumbing to the subtle temptation of worldly logic. Though at first his "indiscretion" seemed to accomplish a great and noble good, it eventually brought grief and harm to those he loved. He learned that "even the most trivial lie is an evil seed."

The Lamplighter Maria S. Cummins - 1854
Poor Gertie is found in the snow with a high fever and no one to care for her—except the old lamplighter who lights the street lamps each night. See how God fills the life of this neglected and dejected little girl with hope as she learns to be a virtuous young woman. *The Lamplighter* is a great book for those who long to remain pure of heart. It left such an impression on my life that I decided to name our ministry *Lamplighter Publishing*!

Boys of Grit Who Became Men of Honour
Archer Wallace - 1925
This volume portrays true accounts of young boys who overcame great obstacles to become admirable men. Born to poverty, slavery, blindness, and various trials --when others saw only difficulties, these boys saw possibilities. These role models will truly challenge and inspire you! Enjoy real-life stories of American scientist Booker T. Washington, Scottish-American businessman Andrew Carnegie, English Bible scholar John Kitto, English artist Josiah Wedgewood, Welsh-born professor Henry Jones, American naturalist John Muir, English sculptor Francis Chantray and more!

Jessica's First Prayer Hesba Stretton -1867
Barefoot little Jessica lives in a home where no one knows about God. She looks forward to spending time once a week with Mr. Dan'el, a miserly old coffee peddler who eases his darkened conscience by giving her stale bread and coffee. Jessica's prayers and innocent questions go straight to the coffee peddler's heart. He learns to value the life of a child more than money as he becomes Jessica's new father.

Mary Jones and Her Bible Mary E. Ropes - 1886
This book is a true story of a little girl whose strongest desire in life is to possess her very own Bible. Through determination, faith, prayer and a twenty-five mile barefoot walk, Mary does whatever it takes to obtain a copy of the Word of God.

The Hedge of Thorns John Carrol - 1611
Based on a true story, here is a gripping account of a young boy who learns the hard way that the choices we make can harm those we love the most. Because he desperately wants to know what is on the other side of a hedge of thorns, he puts his little sister in great danger. From his experience, we learn that God places boundaries in our lives because He loves us. *(Also available in an illustrated version.)*

The Pillar of Fire Rev. J. H. Ingraham - 1859
Enjoy this eloquently-written, illustrative account of the Prince of Tyre during his visit to Egypt more than 3500 years ago. The author brings full color and inspiration to every page in this suspense-filled drama.

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